

THE INDEPENDENT



Friday 16 January 1998

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World Cup tickets being touted on the Web

Unauthorised dealers are selling huge blocks of World Cup tickets on the Internet, despite a ferocious row about the lack of tickets for English and Scottish fans. All the unauthorised tickets have been provided through black-market deals. An *Independent* investigation has provoked the French organisers into looking at the activities of a US-based agency.

The organisers of this summer's World Cup in France are investigating an unauthorised American ticket agency's claim that official tour operators are providing it with tickets to sell on the black market.

The move follows an investigation by *The Independent* into the availability of tickets for the tournament through unofficial sources. If the claim proves to be true, it would undermine not only the integrity of the agents involved, but also raise further questions about why so few

EXCLUSIVE
BY NICK HARRIS

tickets are available directly to fans of the teams involved.

Seventeen travel agents around the world are authorised by Fifa, football's world governing body, to sell 8 per cent of all tickets for the World Cup, which amounts to 200,000 individual tickets. However, several unauthorised companies are advertising tickets on the Internet. Some are advertising tickets for every game in the competition, including the final.

The French Organising Committee (CFO) says it will investigate an unauthorised American agency, 24/7 Ticket Service, based in Atlanta, which advertises worldwide on the Internet and which claims it is able to fulfil orders for World Cup tickets because it is supplied directly by official agents.

Selling on World Cup tickets for profit is illegal in France and the CFO says that it will take legal action against anyone offering tickets for sale without authorisation, including companies in America.

The Independent, having seen tickets being advertised by the 24/7 Ticket Service, posed as a buyer and requested tickets for various fixtures, including England's three opening group games, the quarter- and semi-finals and the final.

A 24/7 spokesman said there would be no problem and eventually agreed to provide 477 premium tickets, with a face value of approximately £19,000, at a cost of £244,000 (a profit of 1.184 per cent).

He also provided a written confirmation that claimed: "My sources are official tour operators as assigned by Fifa in North America and Europe. These



Victory: Zinio celebrates after Brazil's 1994 World Cup win in Pasadena. Photograph: EM Pics

are contacts that my company has used in the past with the previous World Cup and Olympics. The relationships are solid."

The agent said all tickets would be delivered by 1 June, as soon as the authorised agents had taken delivery from the CFO, which will issue them in May. Sixty per cent of seats have been allocated to French fans, 20 per cent to sponsors and authorised agencies for distribution in travel packages, and the remaining 20 per cent to Fifa to divide between the two sides playing each game and 20 national football federations.

For England's opening game against Tunisia, which will be played on 15 June in a 60,000-seat stadium in Mar-selles, 36,000 tickets will be held by people who bought them in Europe, 12,000 by those who bought them from authorised agents or were supplied by sponsors, and 12,000 by Fifa.

England's allocation will come from this last 12,000, and will amount to 4,800, or 8 per cent of the total.

With England's official supporters club alone having 32,000 members, many of whom will want tickets, it is obvious there will be a shortfall in supply. This is already a major concern for the authorised travel agents in Britain.

The Independent spoke to two of the Fifa-authorised travel agencies based in England and asked them whether they knew of official agencies which dealt with American unofficial ticket agencies. John

Welfare splits the nation, says Blair. But could it be his Vietnam?

A campaign for welfare reform opened yesterday with the Prime Minister condemning an outdated system that had helped create two nations, while William Hague warned that welfare would be Labour's Vietnam – a disaster. Our Political Editor reports on the start of a critical debate.

Tony Blair last night appealed to Labour activists to help build a national consensus for change in a welfare system that had split the nation – one nation trapped on benefits, the other paying for them.

"One nation in growing poverty, shut out from society's mainstream, the other watching social security spending rise and rise, until it costs more than health, education, law and order and employment put together."

The Conservative leader said Mr Blair was a salesman without a product – before going on to compare the campaign to America's disastrous and humiliating débâcle in Vietnam.

"This is a noble cause," William Hague told a Parliamentary Press Gallery lunch. "But as with Vietnam, they are not sure why they are there; they don't know how to bring to an end what they are opposed to; they do not know what victory is."

"But they will keep com-

mitting more troops in the hope it will lead to salvation. In the end they will be forced to withdraw through lack of resources."

The Prime Minister's spokesman said Mr Blair was attempting to deal with a legacy of failure after 18 years of Conservative government. In 1993, they had attempted to generate a debate for change, but the problems had continued to grow.

Last night, in a speech to party members in Dudley, West Midlands, Mr Blair said the

BY ANTHONY BEVINS

welfare state was neither a pathway out of poverty nor a route to dignity in retirement; but rather a dead end for too many. A long-term, thought-out change of structure was necessary, even if the rewards did not come until the next century.

"To those who doubt we should do it," the Prime Minister said, "to those who believe it is too risky, too tricky, or even unnecessary, I say examine the evidence.

"With your head, I ask you to look at the facts. With your heart, I ask you to look at the current suffering. Then tell me the status quo is an option."

Among the many points made in a fact-packed assortment of social security "focus files", it was stated that while one in ten had been living in poverty when Margaret Thatcher became Prime Minister in

1979, the figure was now one in five – defined as those living on less than half average income.

Another "focus file" said the poorest 10 per cent of pensioners were on an average weekly gross income of £69.90, compared with £602.50 for the top 10 per cent of pensioners.

There was no mention of the "affluence test" mooted at the weekend by Harriet Harman, the Secretary of State for Social Security, and Mr Blair said: "The state pension will remain the foundation for security in retirement. Those of working age who through illness, disability or caring responsibilities cannot work, will always be protected by a Labour government."

Mr Blair set out four founding principles for change: society had a responsibility to help people in genuine need, unable to look after themselves; individuals had a responsibility to provide for themselves, when they could; work was the best way out of poverty for those able to work; and fraud and abuse would not be tolerated.

More detail was provided by Frank Field, the minister for welfare reform, in a speech to the Thatcherite Centre for Policy Studies last night.

He said there was no question of a "big bang" approach to reform, because that would risk collateral damage to the innocent, but he did argue for a "patchwork", "a rich diversity" or a "mixed economy" of welfare provision, with the Government as a partner, not a dictator, in the construction of a new welfare state.

Leader, page 20
Politics, page 10

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1. Eye, page 28
2. Eye, page 30.
3. Eye, page 25
4. Eye, page 26

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2/BRIEFING



COLUMN ONE

Bookie shouts the odds in Ireland's Army scandal

A Dublin bookmaker has responded to general disgust at the numbers of Irish Army personnel claiming compensation for hearing loss during artillery training by offering 10-1 odds on soldiers suing for impaired vision due to glare from over-shiny boots.

Paddy Power bookmakers insisted its new odds were genuine, and offered in response to public anger at the scale of deafness claims. The scandal has been growing since last April when the Dail was told 350 cases had been settled, and £350m would be needed to resolve all claims. Estimates of the eventual bill plus costs have since grown to over £5bn.

Other bets offered include 20-1 on claims for sore throats due to singing marching songs; 5-1 on soldiers suing for travel sickness during journeys to the Lebanon; 25-1 on compensation for money lost at an Army day out at the races; and 500-1 on the Army winning a collective Oscar for acting.

More than 10,500 past and present Irish soldiers (including a retired brigadier general) have so far brought deafness claims. To national disbelief, another five cases are being brought by soldiers claiming the Army was negligent in not supplying them with sun cream while serving with Unifil peace-keeping force in the Lebanon.

It also emerged an officer awarded £25,000 last year in a "deafness" claim is in line to lead an infantry battalion, even though his medical assessment recommends he should not go within 300 yards of heavy weapons.

In addition 15 soldiers are suing the state claiming they suffered food-poisoning at an off-duty barbecue in the Lebanon.

John Lucey, general secretary of Irish soldiers' association said the claims were serious and criticised "trialisation" of the issue. Food poisoning cases were so serious several were airlifted out for treatment. The kitchen involved was dismantled UN inspectors' instructions, he said.

The nightmare for taxpayers is that much of the hard-earned fruits of Ireland's boom will not now go to raising standards in cash-strapped schools, hospitals and railways but into paying Army "compo", as compensation is known here.

The country is split by the issue. One side believes soldiers are guilty of outrageous neck. The other feels top brass deserve the brick-bats given their stupidity in failing to supply hearing protection during training, and then blocking soldiers using their own, because they were not official issue.

The Irish defence minister, Michael Smith, warned this week the volume of Army damages cases could have enormous implications for Ireland's "compo culture".

He claimed people who had suffered genuinely were being used "to open up a vista for litigation in this country that has no horizon. My department could end up taking finance from education, health and social welfare to pay inflated costs and claims. Financing the Army itself is under threat", he said.

If allowed, ambulance-chasing solicitors would also wreak havoc across Irish industry, and employers could be sued for hosting social events for staff, or being blamed for the weather in which work was carried out.

— Alan Murdoch in Dublin

CONTENTS		
News	3	World news
News	4	Balkans
Education	5	India's election
News	6	Health news
Science	7	Features
In the courts	8	Business
Media	9	Sport
Politics	11	Crossword
World news	12	Weather
Middle East	13	TV & Radio
		30, The Eye, 9
		The Eye, 10
		The Eye, 11, 12

PEOPLE



Monty Python in their Seventies heyday, with the late Graham Chapman third from left

Python back for something completely different

Nobody expects the Monty Python team to re-form. But then again their chief weapon is surprise... surprise and fear... Their two weapons are fear and surprise... and ruthless efficiency... Their three weapons are fear, surprise and ruthless efficiency... and an almost fanatical devotion to *The Pope*...

They may not do the Spanish Inquisition sketch, but the five surviving members of Monty Python are to reunite for the first time in more than 10 years. John Cleese, Terry Gilliam, Eric Idle, Terry Jones and Michael Palin will get together at an American comedy festival in March.

The festival in Aspen, Colorado, will include a retrospective and career tribute to the troupe, with the comedian Robert Klein moderating a discussion and tossing questions at Python members. It will be filmed by American cable television channel HBO

and may be shown in Britain later this year.

It is the first time they have worked together since before the death of Graham Chapman in 1989.

Palin said this week that the get-together, which will include sketches, could spark a reunion of the group: "We've considered getting together before, but there's been this feeling that we aren't quite complete without Graham and it would always be so."

The members have mainly pursued individual projects since making *Meaning of Life* in 1983 but Palin said that the men still keep in fairly close touch and have "a great feeling of affection" for one another.

"If we have a good time in Aspen, that may just mean that we'd consider a future project — most likely a movie. I would think. That would be our best proposition for a full-scale reunion."

— Paul McCann, Media Correspondent

Chicago in for Olivier awards

The two stars of the hit musical *Chicago* are competing for a best actress prize in the Laurence Olivier Awards. In the nominations announced yesterday *Chicago* received seven nominations. And its leading ladies Ruth Henshall and Ute Lemper are both vying for best actress in a musical.

Dame Judi Dench, Dame Maggie Smith, Zoe Wanamaker, Michael Gambon, Rupert Graves, Maureen Lipman, Ronald Pickup, Ian Holm and Simon Russell Beale are among the actors in the running for other theatre awards.

Chicago, an all-British production of a smash-hit Broadway revival about a women's prison, opened at the West End Adelphi Theatre to rave reviews and massive box offices last October. It also gains Olivier nominations for best actor, best director, best choreog-



Lavin: Best actress chance

rphy for Ann Reinking and best costume design.

Not far behind is *Lady in the Dark* at the Lyttleton Theatre with five nominations, including the Amex award for best new musical. *King Lear* at the National Theatre, gets four including Ian Holm for *King Lear*. The awards will be held on 16 February.

— David Lister, Arts News Editor

Wilson retires from Mirror

Charles Wilson, former acting editor of *The Independent*, has retired as managing director of Mirror Group, one of the shareholders in *The Independent*. Mr Wilson, who was also a former editor of *The Times*, has also resigned from the board of Mirror Group.

Mr Wilson, a robust Scot, started in newspapers in 1951 and made his name on the *Daily Mail*. He has since edited Glasgow's *Evening Times*, the *Chicago Sun-Times* and the *Sporting Life*.

Mr Wilson's departure has allowed Mirror Group to restructure its senior management and his operational responsibilities will be taken over by Kelvin MacKenzie, former editor of *The Sun*. Mr MacKenzie will be deputy chief executive and group managing director reporting to the chief executive David Montgomery.

UPDATE

ENVIRONMENT

Recycling is a wasted effort

Homes in England and Wales recycled or composted just 6.5 per cent of their garbage in 1995/96, according to a Government report yesterday. It looks increasingly likely that its target of recycling a quarter of household rubbish by 2000 will be missed.

The findings came in the first annual survey of household and municipal waste collection in England and Wales. Local councils collected almost 26 million tonnes of municipal waste in that year and just over 90 per cent came from homes. The average house produced a little more than a tonne a year and homes issued with the larger "wheely bins", given more space to fill, generated more rubbish.

Of the household waste collected for recycling 37 per cent consisted of paper and card, 24 per cent of glass, and 1 per cent of steel and aluminium cans.

In the year of the survey one sixth of homes were covered by kerbside collection schemes, which pick up recyclable paper or glass and sometimes plastic and cans from outside the front door once a week — the proportion has grown since then. Recycling rates were lowest in London and the large conurbations.

MOTORING

Police to weed out drug-drivers

Motorists who get behind the wheel after smoking cannabis could be a greater potential danger than drunk drivers, the RAC warned yesterday.

Cannabis is regularly smoked by about 10 per cent of the driving population, the motoring organisation said. Yet driving after using it does not carry the same social stigma as drinking and driving, the RAC added.

The drug slows down reaction times and reduces concentration but the police have no way of testing at the roadside for its use.

The RAC is now proposing a three-pronged strategy for dealing with drug driving: ascertain the true extent and danger of drug driving; run information campaigns warning drivers of the dangers and tragic consequences of drug use and driving; develop a roadside tester, similar to the breathalyser, and improve training for police officers to spot the symptoms of drug use.



John Wheeler

SOCIETY

Racist attacks on the rise

A rise in racially motivated crimes was revealed by the chief constable of Scotland's largest police force yesterday.

John Orr, of Strathclyde Police, said in Glasgow figures showed more victims were coming forward, and more racist offenders were being caught.

The figures show that in the nine months from 1 April to 31 December 1997, a total of 332 racial incidents were reported to the police compared with 206 in the year ending 31 March 1997 — a rise of 126 or 61 per cent.

At the same time, detections in incidents where racism was confirmed rose by 11 per cent in the same comparison period — to 72 per cent from 61 per cent.

TOURIST RATES

Australia (dollars)	2.42	Italy (lira)	2,843
Austria (schillings)	20.21	Japan (yen)	210.83
Belgium (francs)	59.41	Malta (lira)	0.63
Canada (\$)	2.28	Netherlands (guilders)	3.24
Cyprus (pounds)	0.84	Norway (krone)	11.96
Denmark (kroner)	11.02	Portugal (escudos)	292.69
France (francs)	9.62	Spain (pesetas)	242.39
Germany (marks)	2.88	Sweden (kroner)	12.76
Greece (drachmae)	457.16	Switzerland (francs)	2.35
Hong Kong (\$)	12.23	Turkey (lira)	336,774
Ireland (pounds)	1.15	USA (\$)	1.59

Source: Thomas Cook

Rates for indication purposes only

ZITS

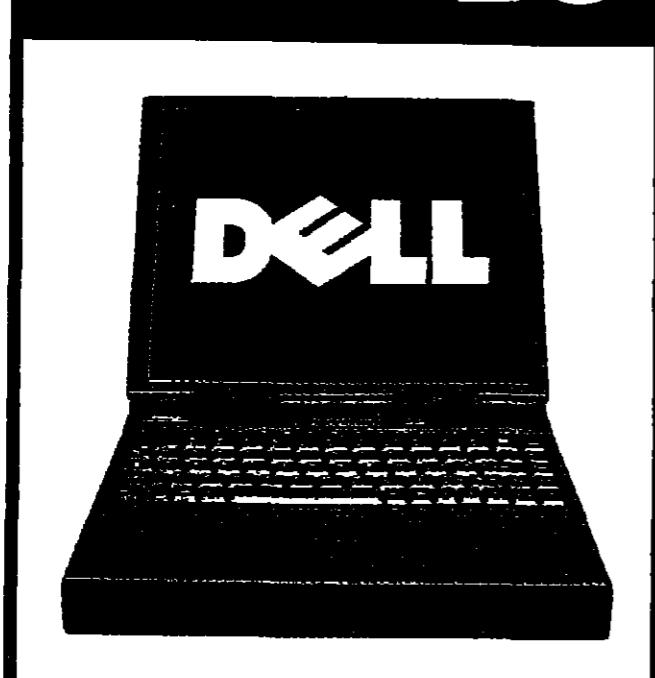
by Jerry Scott & Jim Borgman

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by Chris Priestley

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WINTER SALE
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THIS SATURDAY IN THE

FIVE-SECTION INDEPENDENT

The world of visual arts plus how to find a bargain
THE MAGAZINE



From Singapore to Madrid TIME OFF TV, movies, clubs: the top guide **THE EYE**

Spread betting: Make a mint, don't lose your shirt YOUR MONEY

Mystery over age of the 'oldest mother'

Welsh farm owner, Elizabeth Buttle, has become Britain's oldest natural mother at the age of 60. Or has she? Jeremy Lawrence, health editor, looks at the tangled circumstances of an extraordinary birth.

Elizabeth Buttle has had a baby boy 35 years after her only other child, a daughter, was born in 1962. The new arrival, named Joseph, has astonished experts but it is still unclear whether it will put his mother in the record books.

The baby was delivered by

Caesarean section last November at the West Wales General Hospital, Carmarthen, but details only emerged on Wednesday. Doctors had feared the child would be at risk of a chromosomal abnormality such as Down's syndrome, which is higher in older mothers, but he was born healthy.

Mrs Buttle attributed her achievement to the "clean country air" and expressed a desire to be left to get on with running her farms of which she owns several around Cwmnaw, near Lampeter. The father of the boy, Peter Rawstron, also appeared shy of publicity after it emerged he had left his wife to live with Mrs Buttle. There was confusion, too, over Mrs Buttle's age which was

variously reported as 54 and 60. Medical experts said that while a natural birth to a woman of 54 would be exceptional, at 60 it would be miraculous. If confirmed, it would exceed by five

years the previous British record held by Kathleen Campbell, who was 55 when she had a new son, Joey, in 1987 in Nottingham.

The confusion appears to have arisen from a discrepancy between Mrs Buttle's hospital medical record, which gives her age as 54, and her birth certificate which gives her date of birth as 10 February 1937, making her 61 next month.

Checks by the Press Association at the Family Records Centre in London revealed an Elizabeth Espley, Mrs Buttle's maiden name, was born early in 1937 in the Chester area and there were no further births registered in the same name before late 1945.

Mrs Buttle, who has been

married twice and whose second husband died 10 years ago, said she was delighted to have a new son. "He is my little miracle and he makes me feel like a young woman again. I feel perfectly well and I don't know what the fuss is about. There were no complications and the hospital staff were absolutely marvellous."

Mrs Rawstron, wife of the boy's father, who still sees her husband every day as they run the family agricultural business together, said: "He's been foolish to say the least. I'm very unhappy about the whole situation. Most babies are a cause for celebration but this one is not."

Professor David James, head of fetomaternal medicine at the University of Nottingham, said:

"Women cease their periods around the age of 50 plus or minus three or four years. Fifty-four is therefore one end of the possible spectrum. If a woman is well past her menopause it theoretically should be impossible for her to conceive." All a woman's eggs are present in her ovaries at birth. When the last egg has been released, the menopause ensues. The main limitation on motherhood in the fifties is the age of the egg.

West Wales General hospital was making no comment yesterday on Mrs Buttle's delivery, but earlier John Power, chief executive, said women of her age were given special care by the midwives. "We are all delighted the baby was born healthy and has continued to do well."



Elizabeth Buttle: 60 or 54?

Scottish couple rescue Tibetan refugees

A Scottish couple who were on a trekking holiday in the Himalayas carried out a dramatic rescue of a group of Tibetan refugees. Ian Burrell recounts an adventure story which echoes the film *Seven Years in Tibet*.

Through the falling snow, the Tibetans had walked and climbed for three weeks, covering 600 miles of icy and mountainous terrain in their desperate bid for freedom.

By the time they reached Nepal, the freezing conditions had claimed the lives of five of their number; a 16-year-old monk and four children aged 11 and 12, whose bodies were left as they fell.

Claire McNaughton and her boyfriend Stuart Findlay, who were on trekking holiday, had just stopped for a cup of tea at the top of the 19,000ft-high Nangpa-la-a pass when one of the Tibetans, a young Buddhist nun, sat down beside them. As she took off her shoes and socks, they stared in shock at her frostbite.

Ms McNaughton, 32, told *The Independent* yesterday: "We realised that if she didn't get medical help, she would have serious problems with gangrene."

Ignoring advice from other Western trekkers not to get involved, the Edinburgh couple resolved to help the nun and her companions.

"They had been walking for three weeks wearing little and they only had thin tennis shoes on their feet. They were on the point of death and I think they knew it," said Mr Findlay, 36.

"They were still walking but most of them were hobbling and their only possessions were the clothes they were standing in. We decided that we had to



Warm feeling: Scottish holidaymakers Claire McNaughton and Stuart Findlay with Nima Dildki (right) and Dadai (front), two of the Tibetans they helped rescue from the Himalayas

Photograph: Newsflash

vided the horses to carry the Tibetans to a refugee camp and later flew them to Kathmandu where they were treated for frostbite and exhaustion.

One 22-year-old man had to have both his legs amputated below the knee.

The 21 refugees had been on the run from Tibet - a country whose plight was recently brought into sharp focus by the film *Seven Years in Tibet*, starring Brad Pitt.

The dreadful weather conditions make this the most popular time of the year for Tibetan refugees to make the crossing as they rightly believe that border patrols are at a minimum.

Ms McNaughton said that some of the children were being sent to Nepal to join schools run by the exiled Tibetan government in India because they are so opposed to schools in Tibet, which are controlled by the Chinese. Many of the adults were hoping to join monasteries or nunneries in India.

The Scots couple had spent two months trekking in Nepal, when in December a snow-storm hit the Himalayan region near Mount Everest. Within 36 hours, more than 3ft of snow had fallen, leaving many mountain-side villages isolated.

Ms McNaughton, who runs a small garden nursery in Edinburgh, and Mr Findlay, who is currently unemployed, returned to Scotland two weeks ago.

Ms McNaughton said they hoped to return to the Himalayas to see how the Tibetans were recovering.

"My lasting memory is a mixture of the shock of seeing how badly injured they were and of being able to help another human being even though you were unable to speak to them. There was a bond between us," she said. "We have also had first-hand experience of the tragedy that is Tibet and that has opened our eyes."

help two of the ones who were suffering the most."

One 11-year-old Tibetan girl was suffering from exhaustion and Mr Findlay took her in his arms, while Ms McNaughton and four hired porters helped the nun as they walked for nine hours - climbing a total of 3,000ft in the process - to a hospital established by the mountaineer Sir Edmund Hillary at Khunde, near Namche Bazaar, 90 miles

north east of Kathmandu.

They then contacted representatives of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, who arranged for a rescue party with horses to help the other Tibetans.

Mr Findlay said: "We trekked after them and found them in a terrible state. Many of them were close to death and we had to get them out of there as soon as possible."

The Nepalese police pro-

The cast of the cult television soap *ER* have become the highest paid performers in television history, with the NBC network in America agreeing to pay £8.2m per hour episode in order to keep the show for another three years.

The hospital drama, which is broadcast first on Sky in Britain and the on C4, stars the heart throb George

Clooney and, since last year, the British actress Alex Kingston, star of *Moll Flanders* on British television and the former wife of the actor Ralph Fiennes.

ER has been America's number one prime-time show with a weekly audience of 33 million. The new three-year deal with *ER*'s creators, Warner Brothers, will work out at £536m for 22 episodes

per season. NBC at present pays "junior" £1m per episode and earns around £10m in advertising.

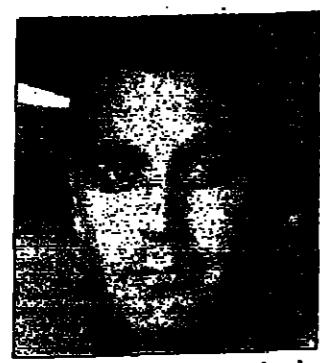
The new fee per episode easily beats the present record holder - £5m per episode for the American comedy *Seinfeld*, also on NBC. The star of that show, Jerry Seinfeld, has decided to close the show at the end of the year.

As for the stars of *ER*, George Clooney is the highest paid member of the cast earning around £100,000 an episode. Alex Kingston, who has rapidly become a key member of the cast since making her debut in the documentary-within-a-drama opening to the latest series, earns around £30,000 per episode, only half as much as the highest paid female star,

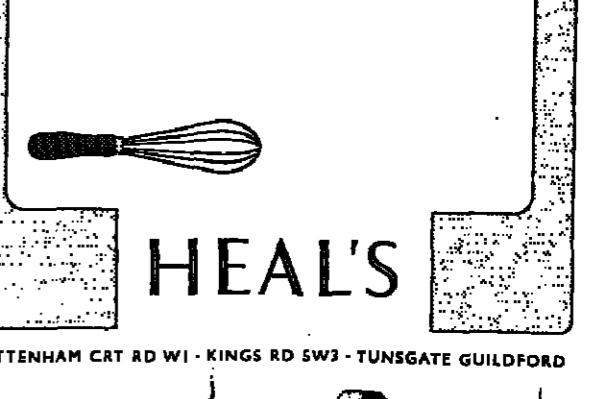
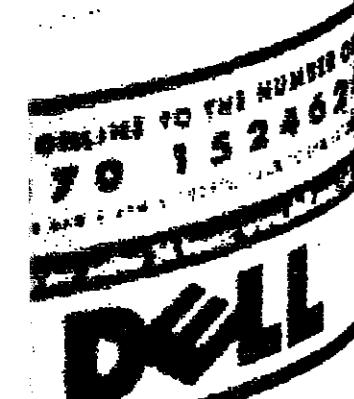
Julianna Margulies. How much each actor receives under the new deal will depend on the new contracts their agents will hurriedly negotiate.

The desire of other American networks, including Rupert Murdoch's Fox empire, to lure the show away from NBC hastened the network's decision to pay out the record sum.

ER becomes most expensive programme in TV history



Clooney: £100,000 an episode



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Pigs to be spared from the chop

As one of the Tamworth Two was cornered in a Wiltshire garden last night, their owner relented and announced that he was willing to cut a deal with anyone who wanted to adopt his pigs.

As darkness fell, three police officers and an RSPCA inspector were trying to round up the fugitive, but the whereabouts of his partner was still unknown.

The pigs' owner, Arnold DiJulio, had insisted that once the five-month-old boars were apprehended he would see that they were taken back to the slaughterhouse, but yesterday he said: "If somebody makes an offer to me then I can sell the pigs and they can take them off my hands." Had they met their intended fate they would have fetched £40 each; their celebrity status means they could now be worth much more.

As the fugitives entered their second week of freedom, Mr DiJulio was being inundated with offers of sanctuary. "They have been ringing my work, ringing up from London and sending a helicopter," he said.

The eight-stone pigs have been nicknamed Fred and Ginger by local residents in Malmesbury, Wiltshire, "because they had to have performed some pretty fancy footwork to have escaped the butcher's knife".

— Clare Gammie



Waxing lyrical: Poets Roger McGough (standing), Andrew Motion, Moniza Alvi (left) and Carol Anne Duffy judging the National Poetry Competition in London yesterday. A record number of more than 9,000 entries are vying for the £5,000 prize. Photograph: David Rose

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Diana fund satisfied with lawyers' fees

Trustees of the Diana Memorial Fund denied they were sacking their lawyers over a £500,000 bill. But one MP described the charge as 'extravagant'. Michael Streeter, Legal Affairs Correspondent, looks at an embarrassing row

tial conflict of interest in having as chairman of trustees a lawyer, Mr Julius, whose firm was also acting as their lawyers.

A commission spokesman said it was a matter of "bringing it to their attention" and they received a reply saying the fund was being charged by the lawyers on a not-for-profit basis.

In its statement the board, which will announce the first beneficiaries of the fund in March, said it considered Mishcon's fees to be "reasonable and appropriate for the work undertaken". None of the legal costs would be made from donations by members of the public but come from the commercial side of the fund, such as establishing copyright for the multi-million-selling Diana tribute album.

Trustee Vivienne Parry said: "The financial benefits from the commercial projects being established by Mishcon de Reya will massively outweigh the costs of setting them up... This is an absolute storm in a teacup."

John Jackson, non-solicitor chairman of Mishcon de Reya, said it had discounted its fees by 20 per cent as a contribution towards good works the fund was hoping to carry out. The firm says much of the money has gone on fixed costs.

Labour MP Robin Corbett described the charges as extravagant; people who had contributed to the fund would be "upset and displeased".

Police shoot 'unarmed' man

A man shot dead yesterday by police in his flat is thought to have been unarmed. The 39-year-old man was shot once in the chest during the raid on the flat in St Leonards, East Sussex and died shortly afterwards. A woman who was with him was not hurt but needed treatment for shock.

An independent investigation has been launched and will be overseen by the Police Complaints Authority and a senior officer from the Kent Constabulary. But Sussex Chief Constable Paul Whitehouse said he did not believe any of his officers had acted improperly. He said that the raid, by officers from the Special Operations Unit, was part of an investigation into an attempted murder and cocaine trafficking. "None of the officers has been suspended because I have no evidence available to me to make me take that course of action. It is not normal procedure to suspend people in such circumstances," Mr Whitehouse said. The operation involved 30 officers, but it is thought only four entered the room where the man died.

Papergirl raped

Police are appealing for witnesses after a 14-year-old girl was raped as she started her early morning round delivering newspapers. The girl, from South Shields, Tyne and Wear, was attacked in the Harton area of the town. A man approached her from behind, pulled her into a lane and raped her.

The girl is said to be shocked and extremely upset over the attack, which happened at about 7am on 6 January. She is being comforted by police, family and friends.

Her attacker is described as in his 20s, medium build and of mixed race, with golden coloured skin. He had black hair, short at the sides, longer on top, and a Tyneside accent. He was wearing a yellow jacket and smart black dress trousers.

Police say there is no connection between the attack and the rape of a 15-year-old girl a few days later in Hebburn, South Tyneside.

Branson trial halted

The Richard Branson libel trial was halted yesterday after one of the jurors appeared to faint in court. Proceedings had earlier been delayed because she had been suffering from a migraine. The judge, Mr Justice Morland, adjourned the case at the High Court until this morning.

Mr Branson is suing Guy Snowden, one of the directors of Camelot, for libel, while in turn Mr Snowden is suing him. The case centres on Mr Branson's allegation that the American businessman had tried to bribe him in 1993 to drop his bid to run the National Lottery.

DAILY POEM

On being the littlest Russian nest egg doll

By Gillian Allnutt

I hear hearts beating round me, four or five of them, like drums.
We are inside. We are immortal. We are wood.

I hear the soft wood-fibre scree into knots.

I hear the plot and fidget and the rote
of Masha. Masha.

We are all called Masha.

I hear the first five notes of song that Noah's wife took with her
when the waters broke, about

the Volga boatmen. Now I hear the shouts,

Our Daily Poems today and on Monday (when the winner will be announced) come from the volumes shortlisted for the 1997 T S Eliot Prize, presented by the Poetry Book Society. All the authors will take part in a reading on Sunday at 7.30pm in the Almeida Theatre, London N1 (box office: 0171-339 4404). This poem comes from *Nantucket and the Angel* (Bloodaxe, £6.95). © Gillian Allnutt.

Education grants 'a lottery'

Funding for further education students is a lottery. They are second-class citizens compared with their counterparts in universities, says a report from the Policy Studies Institute, an independent research body.

The Prime Minister has committed the Government to increasing the number of further education students. But, the authors point out, though the number has increased dramatically in recent years, the proportion from poor families has not. They are being put off by the lack of financial help.

In a far-reaching condemnation of the present system, the report says that only 3 per cent of England's 3.5 million further education students receive discretionary grants while three-quarters of full-time higher education students have mandatory grants.

Spending on discretionary grants has fallen by a third over the past five years. In 1994, their average value was just £665 compared with £1,327 for a higher education student on a mandatory grant living at home. Further education students, around three-quarters of whom are adults who are often studying part-time, also lost out in the distribution of access funds for hardship. Only 1.5 per cent receive them compared with 5 per cent of higher education students and their average value is less than a third those awarded to those in universities.

At least 100,000 further education students are on social security benefits but the Jobseeker's Allowance – which permits study for only 16 hours a week – has discouraged unemployed students.

The report, commissioned by the Further Education Funding Council, reviews research evidence on the effect of the present funding arrangements on student participation. Alicia Herbert and Claire Callender argue that it is "beyond question" that financial help can encourage poor students to attend courses and stop them dropping-out.

Ms Callender said: "Both discretionary awards and access funds have become no better than a lottery. Receipt of discretionary awards depends on where students live and what they study. Access funds depend on which college students attend. The distribution has little if anything to do with financial need or academic merit. The system favours young, full-time students while penalising adult and vocational students and those studying part-time."

Judith Judd

Busy children make better readers

Busy under-eights who rush from one activity to another tend to be better readers than their less active peers, says a survey. Judith Judd, Education Editor, looks at findings which suggest that children with a varied lifestyle do better even than those who never watch television.

Football at 3.30? Tea with Henrietta at 5? Computer games at 6.30? For those parents who spend their lives taxing children from one pursuit to the next the news is good. It may all be worthwhile. A survey of more than 5,000 eight-year-olds by the National Foundation for Educational Research shows that moderation in all things is the key to success.

Researchers asked children how often they took part in six activities: watching television or videos, playing with friends, playing sports, reading books, doing jobs at home and playing computer games. They were asked in questionnaires to reply "most days", "some days" or "never".

Their replies were then compared with their score in standardised reading tests. Except in the case of reading books, children who did the various activities sometimes had higher scores than those who did them most days or never.

Unsurprisingly, children who never read books and who spent most time on other activities read less well than others but there was no significant difference between those who read most days and those who read only on some days.

Children who never watched television had lower scores than those who watched it some days though half of the sample said that they preferred watching television to reading books.

The authors, Greg Brooks, Ian Schagen and Peggy Nastasi, are cautious about their findings and say further investigation is needed into why a broad span of out-of-school activities appears to be associated with better reading.

Mr Schagen said yesterday: "It may simply be that those with more varied lives are brighter."

About one-fifth of children said that they never read out of school and had already switched off reading, a pattern which is likely to persist into adulthood, according to the study. Their attitude was reflected in their scores in the tests.

"The problems of pupils who have negative attitudes to reading, or report difficulty in reading, or read infrequently for



Going places: Eight-year-olds who spent their time on many different activities scored better in reading tests than less-active contemporaries, says a survey

pleasure, need to be tackled very early in their school lives," the authors say.

The report says that reading standards of eight-year-olds have remained largely unchanged since the Second World War, apart

from a fall between 1987 and 1991. Standards rose again after 1991 and by 1995 were back to the same level as in 1987.

It suggests that the reason for the fall in the late Eighties may have been the introduction of the

National Curriculum in 1988 and the high turn-over of teachers during the same period.

• David Blunkett, the Secretary of State for Education, yesterday attacked parents who ignored their children's education be-

cause they were "too busy". The tough message came at a conference in Sheffield, where Mr Blunkett said parents had a key role in raising school standards.

Parents could no more plead poverty as an excuse than a lack

of time, Mr Blunkett said, adding that in helping parents, the Government had to be "both tough and tender". "Far from being a nanny state, we must become an enabling state which ensures that ... families have the backing they need."

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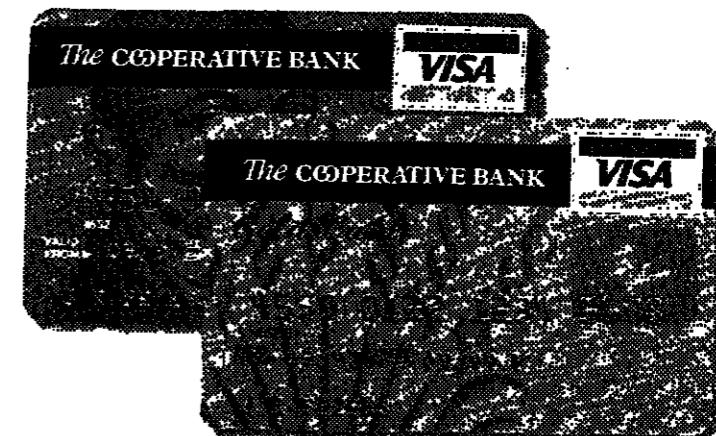
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Privatised railways make trains run later

Official figures released yesterday show a year-on-year decline in the number of trains running on time. Randeep Ramesh, Transport Correspondent, explains why rail companies have failed to deliver since privatisation.

More trains ran late or were cancelled between September to December last year than in the same 12-week period in 1996, it was revealed yesterday.

When the railways were privatised, Conservative ministers promised it would revitalise the ailing network. John O'Brien, the rail franchising director, who monitors the new owners' performance, said the punctuality and reliability levels "continue to concern and disappoint me."

There appears to be no let up in the slide in performance. Mr O'Brien said recent punctuality performances were "deteriorating" and that his office would continue to monitor the situation "very closely".

Figures are calculated for the 57 routes run by the 25 private train companies. For the 12 months ending 6 December 1997, 26 routes had better re-

liability figures than in the 12 months ending 7 December 1996. Twenty-six groups were worse and five stayed the same.

On punctuality, 28 route groups did better, 27 did worse and two stayed the same.

On reliability, South West Trains, which had to cancel a number of services early last year due to driver problems, was among those with poorer performance figures. Others faring worse included Connex South Eastern, Connex South Central and Anglia.

Poor performance is penalised by Mr O'Brien. His office collected more than £2.4m in fines in three months from the train companies in punctuality payments. Connex South Eastern paid out more than £1.5m alone. By contrast, a total of £200,000 was paid to the companies in the same period in 1996 because performances were better.

On punctuality, Richard Branson's Virgin West Coast services managed some improvement in 1997 - but still fell well short of its Passenger's Charter targets.

Two West Coast routes - North West and Scottish - performed so badly that discounts for season ticket holders were triggered.

In addition to the Virgin

West Coast discounts, routes where punctuality performance was bad enough to trigger discounts were Virgin's Cross Country, Great North Eastern - which runs the East Coast main line - and Great Western.

A spokeswoman for Great Western said that many of the problems were to do with infrastructure. "We had a power failure in Didcot in November as well as vandalised signals." Great Western added punctuality had improved since December.

Railtrack, the company that owns that nation's track, stations and signalling, accepted "some responsibility" for the problems. However it pointed out delays caused by the 25 operating companies, rather than Railtrack, have risen substantially over the past year.

Experts also pointed out that train mileage had increased by 7 per cent this year - while train numbers had not noticeably increased. "Some train companies have got more services without buying the trains needed to deliver them," said one train manager.

Mr O'Brien's office made it clear that this was an issue it intended to pursue. "It is something we need to discuss with the train companies," said a spokeswoman.



Line dance: Anglers out early yesterday on the river Tay at Kenmore, Perthshire, for the start of the salmon fishing season. Local experts were predicting the chance of good catches as recent weather has made conditions near perfect

Photograph: Jeff J Mitchell/Reuters

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Media Correspondent
explains how e
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24-hour news

Beef farmers to march on army barracks in food war

The Ministry of Defence has angered farmers by not buying their beef to feed the Army. So the farmers will not let soldiers train on their land. And, says Nicholas Schoon, Environment Correspondent, they are marching on barracks, with their cattle.

Welsh farmers are so angered by the Ministry of Defence's refusal to consider buying more British beef that some have refused to let the Army train on their land. A group of them also plan to march in protest to the Brecon Barracks in Powys today, taking several of their cattle with them from the town's livestock market.

Most of the beef purchased

for the armed forces is frozen, and it comes mainly from the Antipodes and South America, including Britain's former enemy, Argentina. All the purchasing is done through large food and farming company, Bookers, which claims that a buy-British-beef policy would cost about £1m a year more. The MoD says value for money is all important.

But the farmers are infuriated by the ministry's refusal to reconsider, at a time when market prices for their beef and lamb are as low as half what they were a year ago.

In North Ceredigion, near Aberystwyth, more than 10 farmers have now refused to let the Army train on their land, the National Farmers' Union Welsh deputy director, Malcolm Thomas, said. He expects more to join them. He said: "There has always been a close working relationship to allow the Army to

train on our land, but now many of our members are now fighting for their financial survival.

"The bald refusal to consider buying more British beef is the last straw. Jack Cunningham [the Minister of Agriculture] says our beef is now the safest and best in the world. Why can't our fighting men have it?"

Arwyn Davies, chief executive of the Wales Young Farmers' Clubs, which is organising the Brecon march, said buying home-grown beef made more sense than emergency government aid to the beleaguered industry. "That would start to get the market moving again; trade is more useful than aid."

A spokesman for the MoD said the loss of training facilities was regrettable, and exercises would have to be replanned. "But our policy is to seek best value for money - we don't specify the source of the beef."

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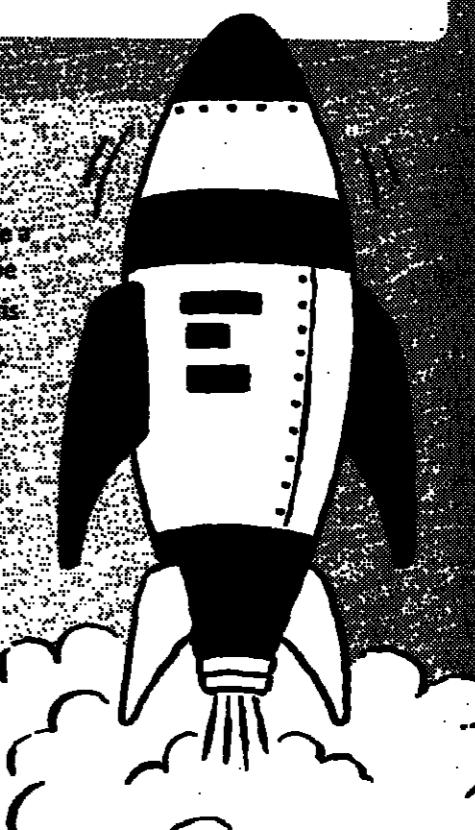
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7/SCIENCE



Trick of light: Teleportation is an everyday means of transport for the cast of Star Trek but at present it works only with photons

Photograph: BBC

We can beam you up, as long as you're a photon

Teleportation – just like in *Star Trek* – has been achieved in a laboratory. That's the good news, or part of it. The bad news? It has only been achieved with a photon, a single wave packet of light, and it would be incredibly difficult to repeat it with any object that had mass.

However, the work by a team at the Institute for Experimental Physics in Innsbruck could lead to super-fast computers which perform calculations using photons, and work faster than anything our present technologies can manage.

In the experiment run by Anton Zeilinger, professor of experimental physics, certain physical properties of a photon were transferred instantly to another photon, without any connection or communication between the two.

"beaming down" to planets, as Captain James T. Kirk and the crew of the Starship Enterprise did each week in the television series, will be a reality in the future.

"People are much too large," said Professor Zeilinger. But the work, reported in the science journal *Nature*, may lead to "quantum super-computers" which could process information faster than the speed of light. The next step is to create a cluster of entangled particles in which "superpositions" of information could be stored.

A computer bit is either zero or one. A quantum bit could be in the superposition of zero and one – both at the same time.

— Charles Arthur,
Science Editor

Scientists still at odds over life on Mars

Remember "life on Mars"? The Nasa claim, not the David Bowie song. The latest research claims that Nasa was wrong, but British scientists say that those claims are, in turn, wrong. It looks like we will have to visit the Red Planet to decide. Charles Arthur, Science Editor, on the continuing debate.

The aromatic hydrocarbons (PAHs). The two papers in today's *Science* say ALH 84001 was contaminated by ice: one analyses amino acids in the rock, while the other looks at isotopes of various chemicals. The papers join a long list of others which have not backed up Nasa's claim. However, Professor Pilling and colleagues produced work in 1996 claiming that they had also found evidence of Martian life in another meteorite.

Nasa claimed that primitive micro-organisms played a part in the production of carbonate found in the meteorite. Carbonate is formed when carbon dioxide, a well-known product of life, dissolves in water.

One of today's research papers denies this, saying analysis of carbon isotopes in the carbonate and organic molecules in the meteorite showed the two came from completely different sources. Timothy Jull, who led the research at the University of Arizona at Tucson, said: "The organic material contains 14C [the carbon 14 isotope] and the carbonate doesn't because the carbonate came from somewhere in space, presumably Mars."

Meanwhile Jeff Bada, a professor of marine chemistry at the University of California, San Diego, searched a sample of the meteorite for amino acids and found very low levels, the vast bulk of which was clearly terrestrial. Professor Bada said he could not rule out the possibility that minute amounts of some extra-terrestrial amino acids were preserved in the meteorite.

All the scientists involved now agree that only one solution will really answer the "life on Mars" question: a trip to the planet.

New research which suggests that the "life on Mars" meteorite was actually just contaminated with terrestrial products drew an angry response from British scientists yesterday.

According to two separate papers published in *Science* magazine today, the organic material found in the ALH 84001 meteorite consisted of amino acids and compounds which entered the rock during the 13,000 years that it sat in the Antarctic wilderness before being discovered in 1984.

But Colin Pillinger, of the Open University, attacked both pieces of work as "naïve", while Monica Grady of the Natural History Museum, who has studied the meteorite, commented: "The claims that they are making that the 'life on Mars' question is dead just aren't valid."

In August 1996 the US space agency Nasa claimed that combined studies of the potato-sized ALH 84001 showed that it had contained primordial life about 4 billion years ago, while still on Mars. Much of the evidence concerned fossilised remains of compounds called polycyclic

Knees hold clue to human body clock

Feeling jet-lagged? Having trouble sleeping? Is your body clock on the wrong setting? The answer could be to shine a bright light behind your knees, according to two American scientists.

The surprising – not to mention bizarre – finding, reported today, shows that it is not only light falling on our eyes which determine our "circadian rhythms" – the body's internal clock.

Without the stimulus of sunlight, our bodies tend to run on a 25-hour cycle. Scientists had thought that the arrival of light on the retina in a 24-hour cycle helps us to reset that clock to match the natural environment.

But Scott Campbell at Cornell University Medical College, New York, has shown that shining a bright light on the area behind the knees, known as the popliteal region, has the same effect.

Many animals have multiple photoreceptors to respond to light in this way. In mammals, however, it had been assumed that non-visual body clock light sensors reside in the eyes. But

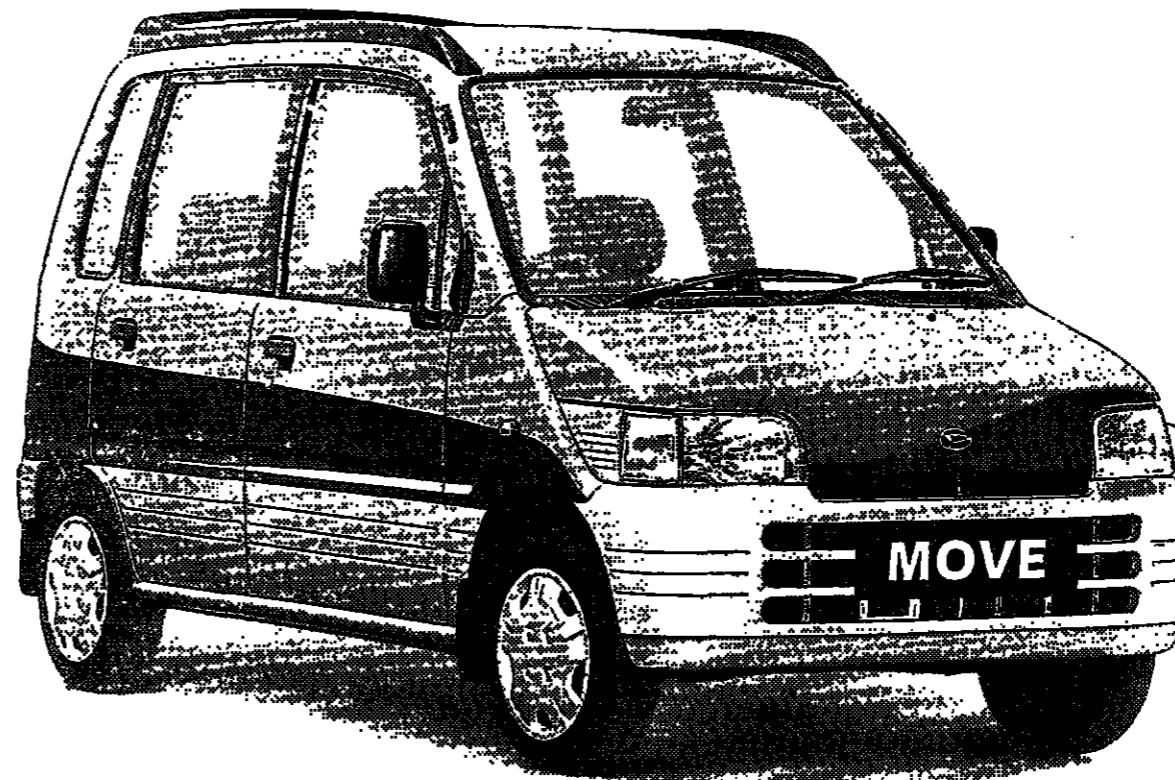
by some quirk of evolution, humans have a circadian rhythm photoreceptor on the back of their knees. For three hours, pulses of light were shone onto the popliteal area of 15 people, though the subjects could not tell if it was on or off because it was hidden.

Shining the light before a certain point in the circadian cycle delayed it; light stimulus after this point produced a phase shift advance. The largest shifts, both advances and delays, occurred at times during which people are normally asleep.

Writing in the journal *Science* the team comments that other scientists have suggested that when light falls on blood vessels, it increases the concentration of nitric oxide (NO) in the blood. Previous research has already shown that NO can shift the circadian clock. And doctors already know that the back of the knee is one point where both veins and the main artery branch are close to the surface.

— Charles Arthur,
Science Editor

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Racist abuse left me in fear, says Marine who deserted

A Royal Marine deserted after "systematic" racial abuse including being ordered to carry a spear and having urine thrown on his bed, the High Court was told yesterday.

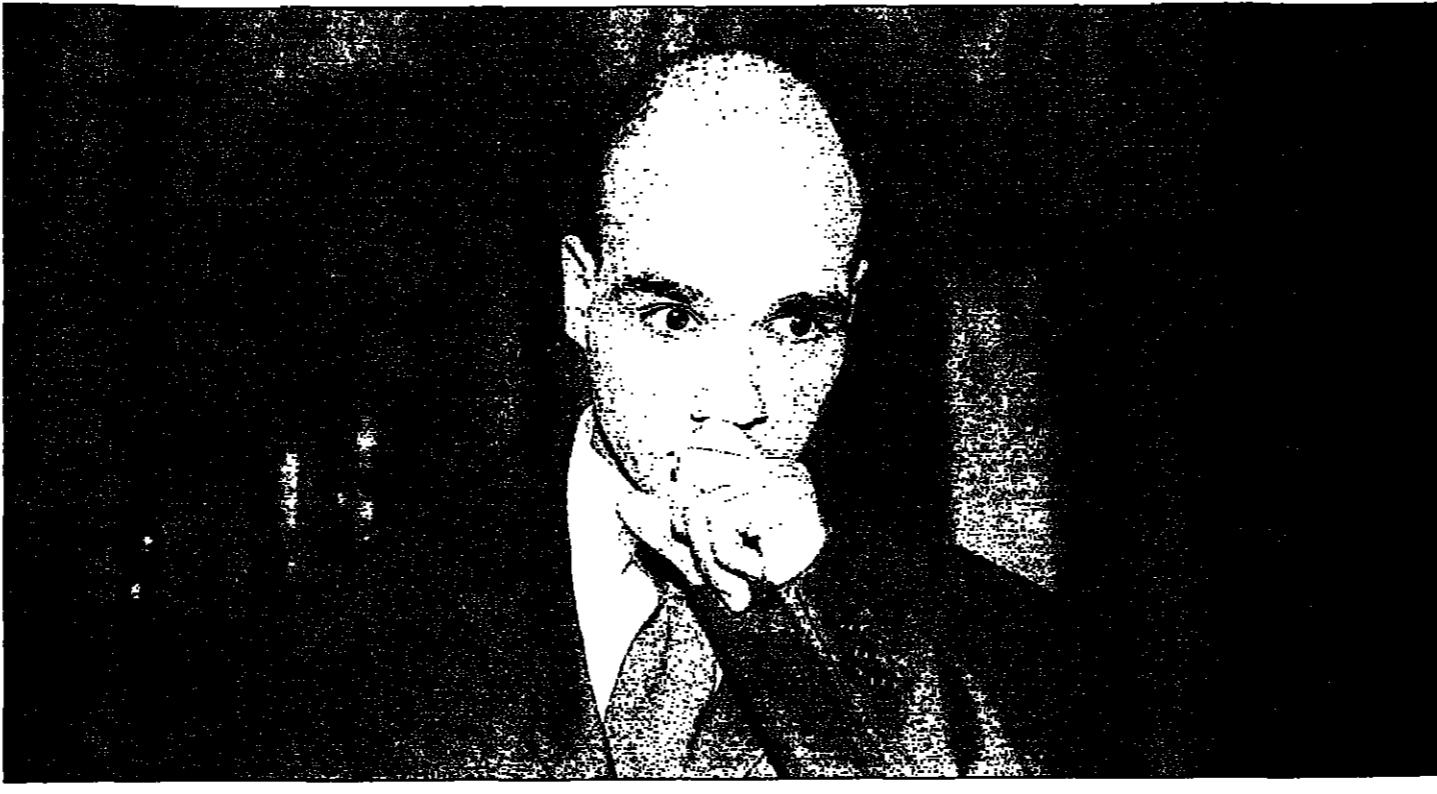
The Ministry of Defence tried to stop the action for £750,000 compensation by claiming the allegations of racial bullying were too late to be heard.

Mark Parchment, 29, pictured right, says that throughout his training he was called "nigger" and "black bastard" by NCOs. He claims he was finally forced to flee his unit in Arbroath after being subjected to a violent assault and mock crucifixion which left him in fear of his life. Mr Parchment, who now lives in London, remained "on the run for five years until he was arrested.

The MoD denied that there had been any racial abuse and said Mr Parchment could not sue them anyway because he had left it too long to mount his claim which was now "time barred".

John Mackenzie, for the former marine, told the High Court in London that he did not realise he had suffered serious psychiatric injury because of his treatment until examined by a doctor in May 1996 and he was therefore entitled to launch his action.

The hearing resumes today.



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Girl, 10, tells of gang-rape in school lavatory

A 10-year-old girl yesterday told a court she had been gang-raped by a group of her classmates. Andrew Buncombe details the girl's shocking evidence.

The Old Bailey was hushed yesterday as the girl told how she had been dragged into a school lavatory, forced to the ground and raped by her laughing assailants.

Speaking through a live video link, she said three of the boys took it in turn to rape and assault her while two others — one, her cousin — looked on. Often breaking down into tears, the girl — aged just nine at the time of the alleged attack — said the gang had threatened to beat her up if she told anyone.

Two 10-year-old boys are charged with rape. They are believed to be the youngest-ever rape defendants in Britain. Along with a 10 and 11-year-old, they are also charged with indecent assault. All four boys deny all the charges.

A fifth boy, aged nine at the time, has not been charged because he is below the age of criminal responsibility. None can be named.

Biting her lip and with her eyes downcast, the girl said the alleged attack at a London school had taken place during the lunch-break while other children played outside.

The boys took her coat and dragged her into the lavatory, her cousin holding her arm behind her back as she was told to take her clothes off. She struggled in vain to fight the off the boys, who tied a coat over her mouth to muffle her screams.

Her voice reduced to a whisper, she said: "[One of the boys] was saying 'Take your clothes off'. I was fighting and I was trying to fight them away but when they got my clothes off [one of the boys] lay on top of me and hurt me."

The girl started to cry as she revealed how she was forced to the ground and raped, as the onlookers laughed at her, during the alleged incident last May.

One of the gang refused to

take part, despite the demands of the others. She said: "They were telling him to come and he was saying 'I ain't going to come'."

"I said ... please don't hurt me and he said 'I am not going to hurt you because you are my friend'."

That afternoon she returned to her lessons, not having told anyone of the incident because she was too scared. After school, she returned home with her cousin, who stayed the night at her house.

The court was told that the boy "shadowed" her as she tried to tell her mother what had happened. The girl said: "He followed me when I was going to tell my mum."

She eventually told her mother that some boys had told her to strip, but did not say any more after she was criticised for not standing up to them.

"Unfortunately, her mother did not quite take on board what she was being told," said Mark Dennis, for the prosecution.

The girl asked to stay at home the next day but her mother made her go to school, writing her a note for the headmistress asking her to investigate her daughter's claims.

The headmistress interviewed the boys and it was only at this point that the full details were revealed. Mr Dennis said one of the boys admitted to the headmistress touching the girl with his penis but all of them claimed she had consented. The police were called in and all five boys were arrested.

Mr Dennis told the court that the boys and their victim all knew each other very well. Yesterday the four boys, who were all referred to by their first names, sat in court reading books and comics they had brought with them.

The law was changed four years ago to allow boys as young as 10 to be charged with rape and Mr Dennis said one issue in the case would be whether they knew they were doing wrong. He concluded: "These days it is unrealistic to suggest that these boys did not fully appreciate that they were doing something that was plainly, seriously wrong."

The case continues.

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Global ambitions at risk as news channel forces BBC cutbacks

The BBC has cut jobs and news bulletins from the British channel that was taking on America's CNN across the globe and winning. Paul McCann, Media Correspondent, explains how everything must be sacrificed for the little-loved domestic 24-hour news channel.

A fresh row is brewing at the BBC because its new 24-hour TV news channel is costing so much that the corporation has had to cut jobs from its global news channel BBC World.

BBC World, which broadcasts outside the UK to 50 million homes in 187 countries, is to lose 24 posts and is having some of its international output replaced by a simulcast of the recently-launched domestic channel BBC News 24.

A number of BBC World's senior editors will be made redundant, freelancers have been dropped and casual workers' contracts will not be renewed because of the need to save money for News 24.

The decision has provoked anger with BBC Worldwide, the BBC's commercial and international arm which has been

developing BBC World for the past three years. Sources at BBC Worldwide claim that their international channel is exceeding all targets to reach new viewers and attract advertising revenue. In many countries BBC World has replaced Ted Turner's CNN on local cable and satellite services because of its Ameri-centric world view. BBC World has been able to make rapid inroads because of the high reputation of the BBC's World Service radio broadcasts.

Now, however, some at BBC Worldwide believe its battle with CNN is being threatened by the need to support News 24 – a service that can be seen in Britain by only a few cable homes and those who watch once BBC goes off air at night.

"One has to wonder if the game plan isn't to subsume more and more of BBC World under a service that is not meant for international viewers," said one BBC source. "It seems that the time spent creating an international news service has been wasted. I don't think the BBC at home has ever understood how appreciated World is globally."

Until last year, BBC Worldwide had full control of BBC World, but last year another BBC restructure placed it with-

in the News & Current Affairs Directorate where it has had to share budgets with News 24.

The expense of running News 24 has impacted on other parts of the News Directorate and last year provoked a revolt by the presenters of Radio 4's *Today* programme and *Newsnight* over plans to make news programmes share editors and budgets to save money.

A spokesman for the BBC said that the shared broadcasts would at present amount to just one and a half hours of programming a day and that all redundancies would be voluntary. "The BBC is taking advantage of the opportunity to jointly produce some bulletins to ensure optimum use of resources."



Humming chorus: Children from the Japanese School in Acton, west London, at auditions yesterday for *Madam Butterfly*. A new production of Puccini's opera opens on 19 February at the Albert Hall, which will be flooded to create a Japanese water-garden set. Photograph: Rui Xavier



Rock 'n' roll suicide: Kurt Cobain, who shot himself in 1994

Festival pulls plug on film in row with rock star

The premiere of a controversial film on the lives of rock couple Courtney Love and her late husband Kurt Cobain has been cancelled following legal pressure. Tim Cornwell in Los Angeles reports.

Kurt and Courtney by award-winning British film-maker Nick Broomfield was to have been one of the highlights of this year's prestigious Sundance Film Festival in Utah. But two days before its first scheduled public screening, organisers have bowed to pressure from Love and her record label and decided to pull the plug.

The festival, founded by actor Robert Redford, has become the leading US showcase for independent films, and Love threatened a lawsuit on the grounds that it contained copyrighted music performed by her own band, Hole, and Cobain's Nirvana. Associated Press reported.

Broomfield, by contrast, claimed he had full legal clearance to use what he said were excerpts from the BBC's *Top of the Pops*.

The film-maker has built his reputation on tracking down, camera in hand, major and minor celebrities from Margaret Thatcher to Hollywood madam Heidi Fleiss, probing their lives and their associates. It is not the first time his subjects, including actress Lily Tomlin and AWB Afrikaner party leader Terre Blanche, have turned prickly.

In dealing with Love, however, he has encountered a rock music star and Hollywood persona with formidable clout, at the crest of her career. The film, he said, contained only a

brief encounter with Love, when he buttonholed her on camera as she presented a free speech award at the American Civil Liberties Union.

The Sundance Festival has prided itself on its independent spirit, operating outside the big-time Hollywood studio system. But organisers cited an ongoing legal matter to justify unceremoniously dropping the film one day before the festival was due to start.

"We have been informed that there are a number of unresolved legal matters between the film-makers and others – including uncleared music rights – which make it impossible for us to present the film," a spokesman said in a prepared statement.

"We hope that Nick [Broomfield] can resolve these matters and that his film will receive the exhibition it merits."

Cobain, at age 27, one of the pre-eminent figures of the 90s rock music scene, was found dead from a self-inflicted gunshot wound in April 1994. He had recently checked out of a drug and alcohol abuse clinic.

Though devastated by his death, Love went on to build up her own highly successful rock career. Last year, she received plaudits for her screen performance as the tragic, drugged-up wife of a US porn king, starring opposite Woody Harrelson in *The People vs Larry Flynt*.

More than 100 films will be shown at this year's Sundance festival – an event for which much of Hollywood decamps en masse, to the mountains above Salt Lake City for 10 days of skiing and networking.

Responding to the decision not to show his film, Broomfield said: "I think it's extremely sad that this festival, which is supposed to represent free speech and freedom of expression, should be behaving this way."

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Blair: 'We'll build a Welfare State for the 21st century'

The failure of welfare was described in graphic detail by the Government yesterday, with Tony Blair taking charge of a campaign to deliver more help to the poor, while the well-off provide more help for themselves. Anthony Bevins, Political Editor, analyses the latest 'Case for Welfare Reform'.

A package of seven welfare reform focus files yesterday described the problem with a welfare benefit system that, as the Prime Minister told the Cabinet, was no longer working.

"We are a party committed to social justice and yet there is more poverty and social division coming out of the current system, as well as a growing cost to ordinary taxpayers," he told his colleagues before embarking on his first roadshow meeting, in the West Midlands, to make a personal case for change.

The latest fact-packed dossier updates information last presented to the country in 1993 by Peter Lilley, the Tory social security secretary, in a document called, "The Growth of Social Security".

In that paper, Mr Lilley called for "constructive national debate" on how to improve help for the vulnerable, while keeping the system affordable.

This time, however, Mr Blair is determined to see reform through, modernising the Welfare State just as he modernised the Labour Party - applying "traditional values in a modern setting".

Yesterday's "Case for Welfare Reform" said: "Our aim is to build a Welfare State fit for the 21st century, which extends opportunity and security to all."

But the principles laid down by Lord Beveridge, founder of the modern Welfare State in 1948, would remain central.

"Society has a responsibility

to help people in genuine need, who are unable to look after themselves; individuals have a responsibility to help provide for themselves when they can do so; work is the best route out of poverty for people who are able to work."

The only addition to the Beveridge outline was that, fraud and abuse, now estimated at £4bn a year, or enough to build 100 hospitals, "should be minimised and rooted out wherever found".

A "focus paper" on the evolution of social security quoted from the original Beveridge White Paper of 1942, saying: "Social Security must be achieved by co-operation between the state and the individual... The state, in organising security, should not stifle in-

tervention, opportunity, responsibility; in establishing a national minimum, it should leave room and encouragement for voluntary action."

But it said that in the last 50 years there had been more than 120 Acts of Parliament. "Some of the changes have been piecemeal and as a consequence, inconsistencies and illogicalities have arisen."

Almost a third of Government spending goes on benefits, and over the last 20 years there had been a significant shift in spending on lone parents; there had been a strong growth of housing benefit; and benefits for the sick and disabled had been one of the fastest growth areas.

Meanwhile the number of pensioners had grown, but their share of spending had fallen - though it still accounts for a third of all welfare expenditure.

Within that statistic, however, the gulf between rich and poor pensioners had widened dramatically. The focus file on pensioners' incomes said that between 1979 - when Margaret Thatcher first took office - and 1995-96, national average earnings had increased by 38 per cent, while pensioners' incomes had risen by 64 per cent.

But that average concealed different experiences for the rich and poor. "The incomes of the poorest 10 per cent of pensioners have grown by 31 per cent in real terms since 1979. The richest tenth saw a larger real increase of 78 per cent."

The two-nation gulf is also disclosed in other areas, with a polarisation between "work-rich" and "work-poor" families in which no parent works. The number of completely workless households had doubled to 3.4 million since 1979.

But society as a whole has also become less equal and the rise in spending had "failed to banish poverty".

Between 1979 and 1996 an extra £43bn was spent on social security yet overall numbers on low incomes grew - [more than] one in four people live on less than half average income today compared with under one in 10 in 1979 (income after housing costs); 32 per cent of children (4.2 million) in 1994-95 lived in a household below half average income, against 10 per cent in 1979; in 1979, the bottom 40 per cent of individuals held 24 per cent of national income; today they hold about 20 per cent."

Setting out the principles for the first phase of reform, the Government said: "We want the debate to be based on facts, without scaremongering. Our aim is to fight poverty, not increase it; narrow social division, not widen it; and extend opportunities, not deny them."

● Free copies of the focus files from the Department of Social Security on 0181 867 3201.

Leading article, page 20



Lord Beveridge: Paper says his principles will remain

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"My aim is to build a consensus for modernising social security. Tonight, I want to tell you why I am so passionate about this issue and why I believe the system must be improved if our



On the road: His crusade to sell welfare reform to the public began with a speech in the West Midlands yesterday

Photograph: David Rose

MY AIMS: THE TEXT OF THE PRIME MINISTER'S SPEECH

The following is an edited extract of the Prime Minister's speech on "Building a Modern Welfare State", made to a meeting of Labour Party members in Dudley Town Hall, West Midlands, last night.

"My aim is to build a consensus for modernising social security. Tonight, I want to tell you why I am so passionate about this issue and why I believe the system must be improved if our

country is to become the beacon to the world I spoke of at conference last year. All my political life I have been guided by these core beliefs: individuals achieve more together than they can alone; rights and responsibilities go together; every individual, no matter what their background, should be given the chance to succeed.

"This idea of community, of a decent society, is at the heart of my ambitions for this country. That is why it is at the heart of the party's new Clause Four: It makes me want to reform the welfare state, and deliver the social justice to which we are all committed. It is a central plank of building a modern Britain.

"The reform of our welfare state is not to betray our core principles of social justice and solidarity. It is to make them live, breathe and work again for the modern age. Over the last 18 years we have become two nations - one trapped on benefits,

the other paying for them. One nation in growing poverty, shut out from society's mainstream; the other watching social security spending rise and rise, until it costs more than health, education, law and order and employment put together.

"When I look at the welfare state, I don't see a pathway out of poverty, a route into work or

a gateway to dignity in retirement. I see a dead end for too many people. I do not believe this is what Attlee or Beveridge intended things to be. I want to clear the way to a new system. Long-term, thought-out, principled reform is the way forward.

"To those who doubt we should do it: to those who believe it is too risky, too tricky, or even unnecessary, I say examine the evidence.

"With your head, I ask you to look at the facts. With your heart, I ask you to look at the current suffering. Then tell me the status quo is an option."

Mr Blair said the costs of welfare, now at £80 for every family per week, was alarming and change was essential. "But any change we make will be made on principle, and the first of these is that all those in genuine need will always be helped and supported by this Labour government."

"That is my guarantee to you as leader of the party: it is the guarantee to the people who elected me as their prime minister. The state pension will remain the foundation for security in retirement. Those of working age who through illness, disability or caring responsibilities cannot work will always be protected by a Labour government.

"Second, work is the best route out of poverty for those who can work. Third, we believe in the responsibility of individuals to help provide for themselves where they can do so.

"These are the original principles of Beveridge. But today's welfare state is simply not true to those principles. It is not supporting many in genuine need. It is not helping all those into work who can work. It is not encouraging personal responsibility. And there is too much fraud."

Mr Blair said it would take time to get the long-term architecture right.

"But even if the rewards come in the next century, with the welfare state put on a sound, modern footing for future generations, then it will have been worth the argument and the controversy. This government will listen. But do not be in any doubt of my determination to see this through.

"No one with a shred of compassion would say we should not protect the vulnerable. But no one with a degree of common sense would say the present system should remain untouched."

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Call for tough action against wrongdoers in police forces

MPs yesterday called for wide-ranging reforms in the way police officers are disciplined, particularly the way officers delay procedures indefinitely by going sick. But, says Michael Streeter, Legal Affairs Correspondent, the committee ducked the chance to set up an independent investigation system.

Aspects of the police disciplinary system have become "virtually paralysed", said Chris Mullin, chairman of the Home Affairs Select Committee.

Launching his committee's report, the Labour MP said there was an urgent need to restore public confidence in the way complaints against officers are handled. "There is no doubt a small minority of officers ... have effectively subverted the system by exploiting every conceivable loophole," he said. "If these people complain now, they only have themselves to blame."

Mr Mullin said he believed that the "political will exists" at the Home Office to implement their proposals while committee colleagues said they expected action by the summer. The report was welcomed by senior officers who have complained they are often powerless to act against corrupt officers. In his evidence to the committee,

he last month, Metropolitan Police Commissioner Sir Paul Condon estimated that a hard core of between 100 and 250 officers in his force were "corrupt, dishonest and unethical".

The MPs' key proposals include reducing the right of silence for officers in proceedings, removing their automatic right to escape disciplinary action if they are acquitted in criminal proceedings, and, controversially, to reduce the standard of proof required for dismissal to the "balance of probability" used in civil courts.

Mr Mullin said that as far as possible, disciplinary action against a police officer should be the same as against any employee and should be conducted with greater openness.

To prevent endless delays caused by officers going sick, the MPs recommend that action should continue despite the illness of an officer, where this does not stop him or her answering the charge.

Chief constables would also have a new "fast-track" power, where there is overwhelming evidence of misconduct, to dismiss officers immediately – though with a right of appeal.

But to the dismay of some critics, the MPs have rejected "for the time being" calling for an independent body to investigate allegations, citing impracticality and cost. Challenged on this, Mr Mullin said they had not ruled it out for the future.

An area of dissent among the MPs is the suggestion that a lesser, civil court standard of proof

be accepted even where an officer faces dismissal. The three Tory members, and the Police Federation, believe the criminal trial standard of "beyond reasonable doubt" should be kept.

David Blakey, president of the Association of Chief Police Officers, said: "The overwhelming majority of police officers have nothing to fear from these proposals and will be pleased that, if they are implemented, the tiny minority of wrongdoers will be able to be dealt with more effectively."

The Home Office welcomed what it described as a "very thorough and interesting" report. "Ministers are studying it carefully and we hope to respond with proposals shortly."



Old promise: Jack Straw, the Home Secretary, visiting the Ravenscliffe Estate in Bradford yesterday, fulfilling a post-election pledge that he made during a Newsnight debate on juvenile crime last October

Photograph: Justin See/Guzelian

Sickness that lets cheats beat the rap

The report describes a graphic example of how three Scotland Yard detectives escaped disciplinary action for moonlighting as bodyguards for a businessman. As disciplinary proceedings began, they went sick and have all since retired on ill-health pensions.

The report tells how Detective Sergeant Thomas Bradley met the wealthy businessman in 1995 when he reported to Belgrave police, claiming that two of his staff had stolen from his Knightsbridge home.

DS Bradley agreed to arrange for the man and his wife to be chauffeured and "protected" while in London. When the family next arrived in Britain later that year they were met at the airport by DS Bradley and a colleague, DS Ian Martin, who held up a placard for identification. "Mercedes cars were hired and a number of officers took turns to act as chauffeurs and bodyguards," the report says. Several thousands of pounds were to be paid for the service.

In November 1995, DS Bradley and DS Martin were

suspended from duty on full pay. DS Bradley was to have been charged with 17 disciplinary offences, including "dishonorable conduct". DS Martin was due to face two disciplinary charges while a third officer, Detective Constable Barry Porter, was to have been charged with seven disciplinary offences.

All three subsequently reported sick. After legal advice, DS Bradley was granted ill-health retirement after the Metropolitan Police "reluctantly" decided it could not proceed with disciplinary charges. DS Martin and DC Porter were also granted pensions, although the force "deeply regretted" disciplinary action could not take place.

"There remains real concern that individuals who are ostensibly mentally strong before their suspension suffer severe psychiatric illness immediately afterwards and yet so quickly recover following their retirement, to the extent that they are immediately able to function in demanding areas of employment," the report concludes.

— Michael Streeter

Heseltine breaks ranks on Dome

William Hague faced yet more dissent from his own ranks last night after Michael Heseltine went dramatically "off message" over the Millennium Dome.

While the Conservative leader and his culture spokesman, Francis Maude, had been directing their fire at the project, the former deputy prime minister decided to speak out in its support.

Worse, Mr Heseltine even had kind words for Peter Mandelson, the much-loathed minister without portfolio who is in charge of the project. Mr Mandelson was doing an important job and it was "very understandable" that he should have visited Disney World in pursuit of ideas, he said.

Mr Heseltine, who ran the project himself until last May, is still a millennium commissioner. Speaking of Mr Mandelson in a BBC interview, he said: "He is doing the job as well as it can be done.

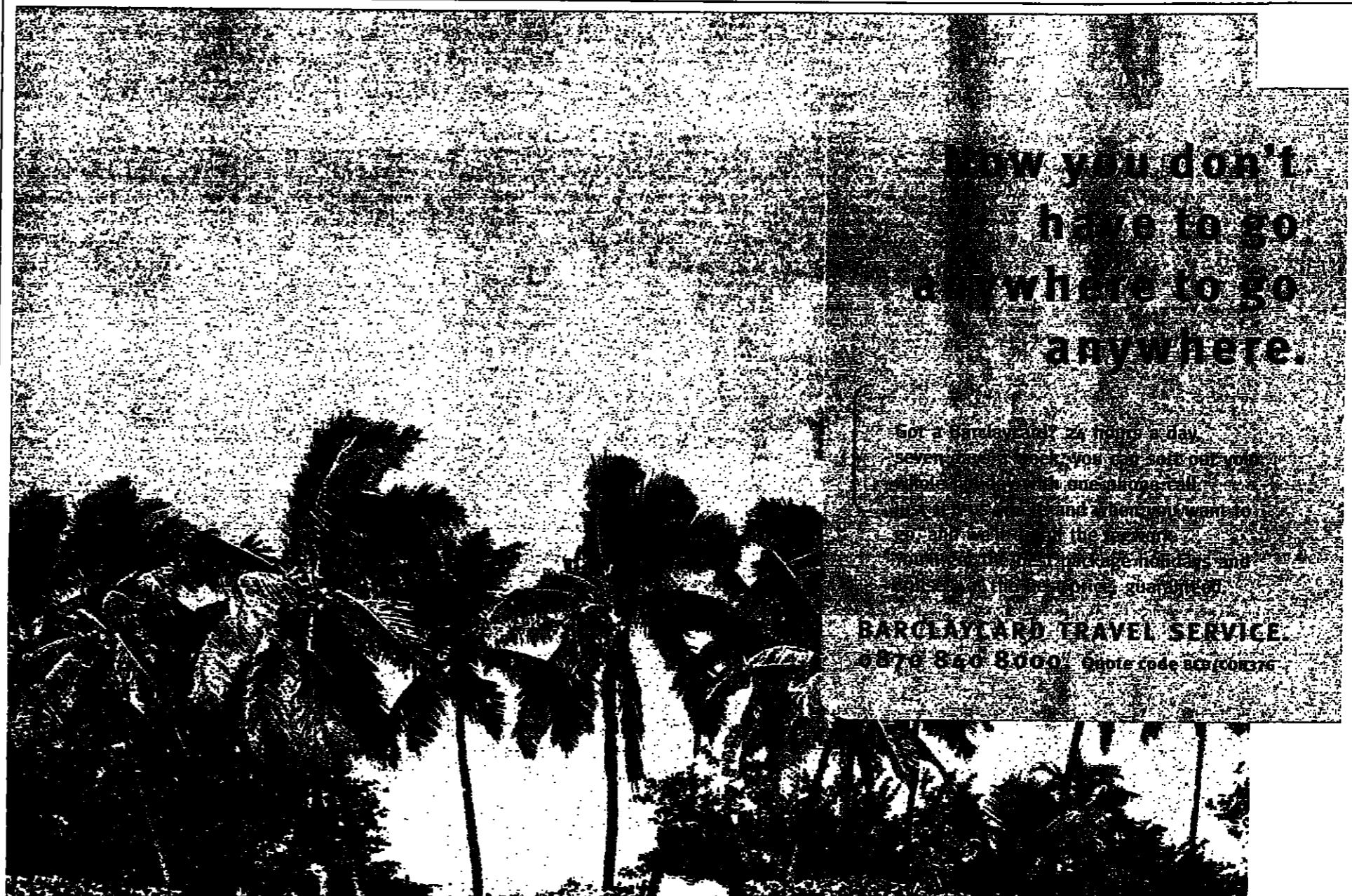
It is difficult and a controversial job to do and there is no easy precedent.

"You have a huge range of people with opinions ... and all of these things have to be reconciled against deadlines and budgets," Mr Heseltine said.

"I have no doubt at all that when we get to the millennium the world will come to see what we have done and this country will stand proud of having had the courage to own the most exciting project anywhere in the world," he said.

Mr Heseltine's timing could hardly have been more embarrassing for Mr Hague, who had given an interview for tomorrow's edition of *The Spectator* in which he attacked the Government's handling of the project, saying:

"There has been a huge failure of management by this Government, and unless the whole thing is to end in chaos the ministers responsible must get a grip."



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Algeria relents over visit from EU team

Algeria yesterday relented and agreed to receive an upgraded European Union delegation to discuss the continuing massacres in the former French colony.

The visit by the team, which according to a Commission spokesman in Brussels, will discuss "all subjects, no matter how sensitive", will take place at the start of next week, in good time to submit a report to EU foreign ministers on 26 January.

With Britain in the EU chair, the troika mission will be headed by Derek Fatchett, Minister of State at the Foreign Office, accompanied by his opposite numbers from Luxembourg and Austria, thus substituting junior ministers for senior officials rejected by Algiers on Wednesday.

The change of mind what would have been a notable embarrassment just a fortnight into Britain's six-month European Presidency. Indeed, the Foreign Secretary himself achieved the

breakthrough, in a telephone conversation with his Algerian opposite number, Ahmed Attaf.

But whether the visit does anything to hasten an end to the carnage which has taken some 75,000 lives in the past six years, and up to 1,700 during the first 16 days of the current holy month of Ramadan alone, is another matter.

Yesterday did bring other fragile grounds for hope, with the release of a leading member of the outlawed FIS Islamic fundamentalist group, permission for the British Ambassador, François Gordon, to visit Sidi Hammed, south-west of the capital where at least 100 people were slaughtered by rebel guerrillas on Sunday, and apparent approval for a separate visit by members of the European Parliament in early February.

In Algiers, Abdelkader Hachani, third ranking leader of the FIS, was freed after being detained for 24 hours for giving interviews to two French news-

papers, in which he urged foreign countries to press the Algerian government to open talks with his group. Technically, Mr Hachani could still be tried for his breach of a three-year ban on such media contact, but even if it proves merely temporary, his release seems timed to improve the political climate during the EU visit.

In Sidi Hammed, Mr Gordon was told by survivors that they had sought guns in vain from the Algerian authorities with which to protect themselves.

Another survivor, whose wife was murdered, said he tried to call the security forces during the attack, but they did not come in time. This is precisely the sort of allegation which has fanned rumours of tacit government connivance in some of the massacres, a charge furiously denied by Algiers, as it resists foreign involvement. "It is up to the English and Americans to come and protect us," the man said.

— Rupert Cornwell



Love is ... Sugar Lee Hooper (left) and Andrea van der Kaap undergoing a marriage ceremony early yesterday. Conducted by the mayor of Kaatsheul, it started at midnight on Wednesday, the earliest time allowed after giving the necessary two weeks' notice once the law permitting homosexual couples to marry in the Netherlands was passed on 1 January this year

Photograph: Toussaint Kluiters

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US tobacco firm 'targeted children'

A new storm was breaking around the American tobacco industry yesterday following the release of internal documents from RJ Reynolds apparently showing how the company courted young teenagers to boost cigarette sales.

The papers, spanning 1973 to 1990, appear to contradict testimony given to the United States Congress by RJR executives three years ago in which they said under-18-year-olds had never been targeted. They could face perjury charges.

"If you are looking for a smoking gun regarding youth smoking, you need look no further," commented David Kessler, former head of the US Food and Drug Administration.

Reacting to the papers, the White House asked Congress to move quickly to pass legislation authorising a litigation settlement struck by the tobacco companies and US states last

year. "The President finds the release of the documents in the tobacco case to be one more cause for urgency," it said.

Under the settlement, the tobacco companies would pay out \$368bn (£231bn) over 25 years and pledge to take action to reduce smoking levels among young people. In return, they would receive partial immunity from future suits.

The documents were released by Henry Waxman, a California congressman who has led the crusade against tobacco. "They targeted kids as young as 14," Mr Waxman said, adding that he would be pushing for perjury charges.

RJR has said the documents have been "cherry picked" and taken out of context. It added that one mention of 14-year-olds was a typographical error and should have read 18-year-olds.

— David Usborne,
New York

Jospin offers race apology

Attempting to amend for a political *faux pas*, the French Prime Minister, Lionel Jospin, said yesterday he would apologise to conservative MPs for comments linking the right to it will be the last."

He said he would express his regrets during next week's question-and-answer session in parliament for comments he made on Wednesday, in which he said the right had opposed the abolition of slavery 150 years ago. Mr Jospin, under pressure for his failure to end protests by the unemployed, tried to play down his remarks at the Na-

tional Assembly. "It's really a parliamentary incident, of which there are many in a democracy," he said. "It shouldn't be dramatised. And as it's the first time, I intend that it will be the last."

Conservative MPs shook their fists and yelled at Mr Jospin after a fellow left-wing MP asked him to speak on the 150th anniversary of the abolition of slavery. "One is certain the left was for the abolition of slavery, and you can't say the same for the right," said Mr Jospin.

— AP, Paris

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Brass. Was £37.99 £25.99

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13/MIDDLE EAST

Netanyahu refuses to give up the West Bank

Benjamin Netanyahu will make clear at his meeting with President Clinton next week that he has no intention of withdrawing from most of the West Bank. Yasser Arafat, who meets Mr Clinton two days later, hopes the US will finally put pressure on Israel.

Patrick Cockburn in Jerusalem reports on the likely outcome of the confrontations.

In the run up to his meeting with President Bill Clinton next week, Mr Netanyahu is already leaving the American leader in no doubt that Israel has no intention of implementing the Oslo accords of 1993 whereby it would withdraw from most of the West Bank and Gaza. This week the Cabinet approved a map of Israeli interests which will leave it holding at least 60 per cent of the West Bank.

Mr Netanyahu is not trying to pull the wool over President Clinton's eyes. The White House knows that the Israeli Prime Minister believes Israel is strong enough, politically and militarily, not to give land for peace – the basis for any Israeli-Palestinian agreement since the war of 1967. In effect Mr Netanyahu, unlike the previous government, is ruling out Palestinian self-determination.

Can he get away with it? Mr Netanyahu is no mean judge of politics in the US, where he began his career as an Israeli diplomat in Washington and New York. His itinerary over the next week shows how he intends to put pressure on Pres-

ident Clinton before the US puts pressure on him. His first appointment is with Newt Gingrich, the right-wing Republican Speaker of the House, known to sympathise with his views. Then he speaks to thousands of Christian fundamentalists who advocate extreme Zionism and, despite a crowded schedule, will find time to be interviewed on television by the preacher Pat Robertson.

The majority of American Jews say they support Oslo and want pressure on Mr Netanyahu to implement it. But the Jewish community activists are on the right and so are the campaign funds. Mr Clinton seems to have drawn the conclusion from his 1992 defeat of President Bush, who held back funds to stop Israel building settlements on the West Bank, that it is always unwise, in terms of domestic American politics, to seek a confrontation with an Israeli government.

One development might change this. Gassan Khalil, a Palestinian commentator, argues that "the US will only put pressure on Israel if it believes that the failure of the peace process with the Palestinians is damaging the American pre-

dominance in the Middle East as a whole. There were signs of this happening in November and December when the US could not rally its Gulf war coalition against Iraq or prevent Iran hosting a conference of Islamic leaders in Tehran."

Other than this Mr Arafat does not have too many cards to play when he sees Mr Clinton on 22 January. "We will simply ask for the existing agreements signed by Israel since 1993 to be implemented," said Nabil Shaath, the Palestinian Minister of Planning,

yesterday. There is no doubt about what these accords said. The Palestinians can make some good rhetorical points about their implementation. Mr Shaath says: "Even after a military coup in the Third World the first announcement is usually that the new leaders will abide by previous agreements."

Mr Arafat is not responsible for the disparity in power between Israel and the Palestinians.

"If God forbid, there is a failure in this peace process, then all options are open," he said yesterday in Amman. But he knows his options are few. Oslo was in large part a result of the pressure on Israel by the intifada of the 2.5 million Palestinians in Gaza and the West Bank after 1987. Mr Arafat had little to do with it and there is no sign of a renewed uprising.

Since he returned from Tunisia in 1994, Mr Arafat has marginalised the local leadership and rules largely through

his security police. He ignores the Palestinian parliament. He shows little interest in the 3.5 million-strong Palestinian diaspora where he was once based. Mr Khalil says that, in practice, Mr Arafat's Palestinians Authority will not allow any civil resistance to Israel because "this would threaten their narrow interests and the privileges granted them by Israel".

Both the US and the Palestinians hope that Mr Netanyahu's government will split between supporters and opponents of Oslo. This may happen. But the Israeli leader is adept at delaying tactics. He knows also that Washington does not want a confrontation. The opposition Labour party is weak. Some 30,000 opponents of Oslo gathered this week in the square where Yitzhak Rabin, then prime minister, was assassinated in 1995. "The people of Israel live," shouted one of their leaders. "Oslo is dead."

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One development might change this. Gassan Khalil, a Palestinian commentator, argues that "the US will only put pressure on Israel if it believes that the failure of the peace process with the Palestinians is damaging the American pre-

dominance in the Middle East as a whole. There were signs of this happening in November and December when the US could not rally its Gulf war coalition against Iraq or prevent Iran hosting a conference of Islamic leaders in Tehran."

Other than this Mr Arafat does not have too many cards to play when he sees Mr Clinton on 22 January. "We will simply ask for the existing agreements signed by Israel since 1993 to be implemented," said Nabil Shaath, the Palestinian Minister of Planning,

yesterday. There is no doubt about what these accords said. The Palestinians can make some good rhetorical points about their implementation. Mr Shaath says: "Even after a military coup in the Third World the first announcement is usually that the new leaders will abide by previous agreements."

Mr Arafat is not responsible for the disparity in power between Israel and the Palestinians.

"If God forbid, there is a failure

Cook chides US for its hard line on Iran and Iraq

The Foreign Secretary, Robin Cook, moved Britain's foreign policy several steps away from the United States yesterday, expressly differentiating Britain from the US in two key policy areas: Iraq and Iran. Mr Cook was making a flying – and heavily chaperoned – visit to Washington to launch Britain's presidency of the European Union. But his remarks were clearly intended also to burnish Britain's credentials among its European partners.

Mr Cook – who arrived a day later than planned and, at the Prime Minister's insistence, sans mistress – was on the first leg of a world tour designed to project Britain's simultaneous presidency of the European Union and chairmanship of the world's elite economic club, the Group of Seven industrialised nations.

Addressing a seminar on European-US relations before formal talks with his US counterpart, Madeleine Albright, Mr Cook

RUSSIANS OFFER REPLACEMENTS IF IRAQ BANS AMERICAN RECONNAISSANCE AIRCRAFT

The Russian defence minister, Igor Sergeyev, yesterday offered Russian-made spy aircraft to replace American U-2 reconnaissance aircraft over Iraq if Baghdad banned US observation flights from its airspace.

"Our countries want the problems to be solved peacefully. If Iraq is against the U-2s, we can propose Russian-made planes that have the same performance as US aircraft, and that can be the start of a solution," Mr

Sergeyev told a news conference held with the French defence minister, Alain Richard, on the first day of the Russian's three-day visit to France.

Iraq, which has triggered a new crisis in the United Nations Security Council by blocking a weapons inspection team headed by an American, has in the past threatened to shoot down US U-2 aircraft flying over its territory during such confrontations.

stressed Britain's solidarity and agreement with the US on many issues, including defence, Nato expansion and the continued international presence in Bosnia. But he also aligned Britain more closely with its European partners in several areas, implicitly chiding his hosts for their stance.

The most carefully worded, and perhaps least expected, of these departures related to Iraq. While noting that Britain had stood "four square" with the US in its determination "to take whatever action is necessary" to ensure Iraq's compliance with United Nations Security Council deci-

Yesterday, the US-led team awaited instructions from United Nations headquarters. Iraq's UN ambassador, Nizar Hamdoon, said that his country would only co-operate if the UN reduced "the dominance of American citizens" on inspection teams. He dismissed Wednesday's Security Council statement deplored Iraq's blocking of the US team. Iraq has accused the UN of trying to find evidence that Baghdad tested chemical

and biological agents on prisoners in 1995. Nils Carlstrom, head of the UN inspection office in Baghdad, said that all the inspection teams were able to go about their business yesterday except for the US-led team. The inspectors were "waiting [for] orders from New York," he said.

UN inspectors must certify that Iraq has eliminated its weapons of mass destruction before the UN sanctions can be lifted.

destruction, then the council will need to take action on the oil embargo."

The term "light at the end of the tunnel" has been used by France and Iraq to argue that Baghdad should be given clear objectives, and preferably a timetable, for the lifting of the UN embargo. US statements have

been ambiguous, with some officials suggesting that the embargo will remain in force so long as Saddam is in power.

On Iran, Mr Cook was more forthright, describing it as "an issue where the US and the EU find it harder to see eye to eye" and lining Britain up firmly with Europe. "Isolating Iran," he said, "is not the right response". He warned that economic isolation would have no serious effect on Iran's attempts to acquire weapons of mass destruction. He also attacked US legislation that provides for sanctions on companies and third countries that trade with Iran and Libya. "We believe it is wrong in principle and counterproductive in its effect on Iranian politics," he said. "It has an extra-territorial impact on legitimate business which is unacceptable", and could only help Iran's "hawks".

— Mary Dejevsky,
Washington

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The Independent and Independent on Sunday in association with Terence Conran are delighted to offer readers the opportunity to enjoy lunch or early evening supper at six of London's top restaurants throughout January and February for £10

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British firm told to quit Angola

Angola yesterday ordered all foreigners working for the London-based security company Defence Systems Limited, founded by former officers of Britain's elite Special Air Service, to leave the country immediately, a company official said.

DSL's chief executive, Richard Bethell, told clients, which include most foreign companies and embassies in Angola, in a letter on Wednesday to put in place security contingency plans.

The company official, who asked not to be named, said an aircraft was on standby in Johannesburg, awaiting clearance to land in Luanda to fetch the 103 foreigners, of whom 45 are Gurkhas from Nepal.

DSL was the largest private security firm in Angola, guarding top expatriate officials of most embassies as well as oil and mining companies.

There are over 90 security companies operating in Angola. "This is a nightmare, not only in terms of who will protect our houses and offices, but also for any foreign company planning to invest in Angola," a senior Western diplomat said.

The Angolan government issued a decree on 24 December ordering DSL's immediate expulsion, saying its operations were irregular. The government informed all expatriates working for the company to leave the country by yesterday morning.

The Interior Ministry said DSL, which operated as DSL Angola since 1992 when it became illegal for foreigners to own security companies in the country, had kept its top management exclusively for foreigners. Most foreign security companies in Angola have joint ventures with Angolan partners, usually army generals who are paid hefty dollar salaries.

— Reuters, Johannesburg



Bloodied: Dan Mathews, an activist of the US group Petz, in a Milan boutique during men's fashion week, as campaigners protested against use of fur. Photograph: Reuters

Pinochet still calling the shots

Old soldiers never die and some, such as Chile's Augusto Pinochet, refuse to fade away. The general, 82, who oversaw the death of 3,000 opponents over 17 years before handing over to a civilian government in 1990, is still calling the shots.

Due to retire as army commander this month, he has postponed his departure to an

unspecified date. Constitutionally, he can remain until 11 March but his view of the constitution is not necessarily that of your average democrat: he overthrew the elected Marxist government of Salvador Allende in 1973. And he pushed through a constitutional change which allows him to serve, without election, as a senator for life.

His pending switch from army chief, and still a powerful force behind the throne of President Eduardo Frei, to senator created uproar this week, including in parliament, which broke off in chaos. It was then that Gen Pinochet said he would prolong his army career.

— Phil Davison,

Latin America Correspondent

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Remember Vukovar – for the sake of the dead, and the survivors who must bring it back to life

The communities shattered by the Balkan wars are slowly being put back together again. Croatia yesterday reoccupied Eastern Slavonia, an area taken by the Serbs in 1991 and then controlled for the last two years by the United Nations. Andrew Marshall looks back to the horrors of the war, and forward to a future that may also be bleak.

Remember Vukovar? It's one of those painfully angular Balkan names which for a few days or months became a headline during the wars of the first half of this decade. Then it faded away again, just a place on the map and a few curled newspaper cuttings.

Something similar has happened in the town itself. The ruins have softened over time, and undergrowth has hidden some of the worse scars. The shell-pocked buildings have settled into the rubble. It no longer has the appearance of atrocity; rather, of history. As you wander the streets of what was once a fine baroque Habsburg town, you can only guess about the buildings: School? Barracks? Town hall?

You can only guess, too, at the sufferings and the horrors that took place here, on the banks of the mighty and slow-moving Danube. For Vukovar was taken by the Serbs - local Serbs and the Yugoslav army - in 1991, after Croatia declared independence from Yugoslavia. Eastern Slavonia was - a part of Croatia with a large Serb minority. Vukovar became a symbol for both sides: of Croatian resistance, and of Serb success. For three months it suffered under daily assault, millions of shells falling before the conquerors finally moved in in November.

One popular theory in Britain has it that the Balkan wars were ignited by Germany's decision to press for recognition of Croatia in December 1991. This would come as something of a surprise to the inhabitants of Vukovar. By the time European Union leaders had finished shuffling their papers in the Dutch town of Maastricht, the people of Vukovar - those that were still alive - had emerged from their cellars to find a town that had been levelled by Serb artillery. Then, the remaining houses were destroyed: a land mine in the living room, perhaps, or a tank shell through the front window. In some houses, the gas was turned on and a candle lit on the upstairs



Left: Vukovar residents with photographs of people who went missing after the city fell to Serb forces in the early stages of the Balkan wars. Now that it has reverted to Croatian control, there are fears of retribution

Photograph: PA

There are concerns about their safety, about their civil rights, and about their access to free media.

Franjo Tuđman, Croatia's President, remembers Vukovar well, and has used it to his advantage. It was a potent weapon during the presidential election last year, when Mr Tuđman took a "peace train" to Vukovar. The return of Eastern Slavonia is an important symbol for Croatia: five years after it was first recognised by the international community, all its land is under Croatian rule.

Western diplomats say that Croatia has been more compliant in recent months about the Serb minority. But the US - Croatia's main ally during the war - made clear yesterday that it is watching.

"We expect Croatia to fulfil its responsibilities to guarantee equal treatment and full protection of the rights of all Croatia's citizens," said President Bill Clinton. It remains to be seen if these pious hopes translate into reality.

If the West wants to remember Vukovar, then it has the tools. There will still be international monitors in Eastern Slavonia. Croatia wants good relations with, and eventual entry to, the European Union and Nato; there are plenty of levers. But Europe can remember Vukovar in other ways, too. The town is a ruin, and officials say it would cost some \$2.5bn (£1.56bn) to rebuild it to its pre-war splendour. Croatia can find \$1bn, but wants the rest to be donated by the international community. It is not much for a town that was destroyed while Europe waited on the sidelines.

landing. Some 200 people were taken from the hospital and murdered.

Yet as you drive through its eerie streets, each reduced to ruins no higher than a man can stand, there are houses that are virtually untouched. For Serbs lived in Vukovar, too. They were not spared the artillery assault, but their houses were left standing. The Catholic church, though badly damaged and pockmarked with the ugly acne of shell fire, survives. When you first realise how completely this separation of man from man was done - the energy, the planning, the in-

tent, street by street, village by village - it is hard to keep your sanity. Vukovar was not the only place where this happened, nor were the Croats the only ones to suffer. But it was one of the first casualties in a war to remove ethnic groups and change boundaries, to take down one flag and put up another. Croatia in two lightning and deadly offensives, struck back at the Serbs in 1995, leaving Eastern Slavonia as the last under Serb control, expelling the Serbs and cleansing its own boundaries.

There is good news here, of a sort. East-

ern Slavonia has changed hands peacefully, after two years of UN supervision, unlike the Krajina or Western Slavonia, where force of arms was the chosen route.

"Two years ago few people believed this would be possible," said Bernard Meyer, UN Under-Secretary-General for peace-keeping operations yesterday.

But now the Russian soldiers crouched in their sandbagged positions on the main road are gone, and this is Croatia again: Croatian number plates, Croatian local authorities, Croatian money. There are 75-80,000 Croats waiting to move back, and

roughly the same number of Serbs still there, some living in what were Croat houses, waiting to see what will happen. That is another reason to remember Vukovar. The Serbs in Eastern Slavonia, some of them refugees from the rest of Croatia, some of them long-term residents, fear for the future, and with justification. There will be revenge attacks.

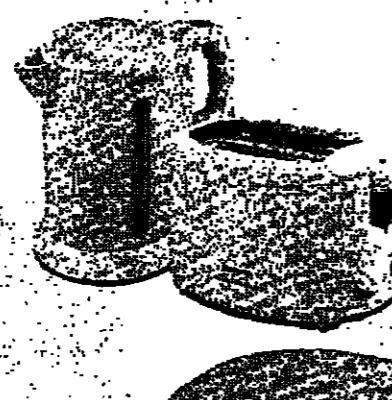
There will be hatred, and the settling of scores. And there will also (if the evidence of the past is anything to go by) be precious little effort by the Croatian government to make these people want to stay.

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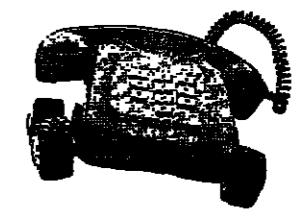
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16/INDIA'S ELECTION



Family fortunes: Sonia Gandhi at yesterday's rally in Bangalore, where her reference to the Bofors scandal electrified the crowd. Photograph: Reuters

Sonia reels in the crowds for Congress

In the software city of Bangalore, Sonia Gandhi launched her campaign for India's Congress Party in earnest yesterday. And for the first time she demonstrated her power as a crowd puller.

What is the point of Sonia Gandhi throwing herself into the Indian election campaign? The point is to remagnetise the great electrode of Indian politics that Congress used to be, to reawaken the memory among India's poor of the all-embracing paternalism of Congress in its glory days, and bring back, like so many iron filings, all those who have drifted off to other parties. That was how one senior Congress figure put it to me in Bangalore this afternoon as Mrs Gandhi's campaign got under way in earnest.

Her first meeting last Sunday was just a foretaste, a necessary genuflection at the gate of martyrdom. But Congress support in Tamil Nadu long ago withered away beyond revival

and the meagre crowd which gathered at the place of Rajiv Gandhi's assassination had an unmistakable bused-in look.

So here in the "Garden City" in Karnataka state, where Congress is still a force, she faced her first important test. Outside Congress headquarters tribal drummers banged away while aparatichiks in white homespun kurta and pajama milled about busily inside.

The town, the most fashionable and one of the most prosperous in the country, was draped in welcome banners, lurid pink and mauve paintings of "Madam" that did her no favours, signs reading "We are honoured to have our charismatic presence

BY PETER POPHAM

in the Congress", and "Sonia - perfect personality". With very little to go on, the party's myth-making machine has gone into overdrive.

The rally built slowly and steadily until it was of an awesome size. Across the playground of a school, its perimeter dominated by massive cut-outs of Sonia, Rajiv and the party's much-anathematised president Sitaram Kesri, Congress cranked out the old time religion. Nehru's twist with destiny speech, with which he greeted independence, other speeches from other times, the lift of the classical singer MS Subhalakshmi, and a rampaging movie tune with new words eulogising the dynasty, all these blared out across the ground.

And slowly it filled. The crowd, 90 per cent male, predominantly young, poor but not ragged, had come from all over the state, from up to 500km away. Among them was a good spattering of the minorities - Jains, Christians, "Tribals" - which traditionally voted Congress but which drifted off to other, newer parties like Janata Dal during the years of Congress's decline, and who must now be lured back. Only the women from the Banjara community really stood out, draped in bright gowns covered with mirrors, hair clasped in pewter bangles the size of pepper pots, babies clamped to their waists.

At last, as the speech ended, she had done it, she had reconnected the audience to the mains, and the translation of her (English) words was greeted with whistles and cheers.

It is not surprising that the one subject on which Sonia Gandhi shows real passion concerns her private hurt and bitterness. But it will be interesting to discover how galvanic such emotion can be across India. For there can be few countries where cynicism about politicians is more deeply ingrained, and the Gandhis are not exempt.

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JOHN
LYTTLE

This is no pigment of the imagination. The other half are plainly – and playfully – thinking pink again. So: what are we going to do about it?

One hates to be the bearer of bad tidings, but the evidence is clear. The breeders want pink – our colour! – back. Read it and sleep: Baby Spice in her mocking baby dolls; Boots No 7's current parody campaign ("Pink girls flirt with everyone, pay attention to no one – pink girls get what they want"). Pink ribbons for breast cancer awareness. Pink all over the cover of *Fab and Proud: The Politics of Sex*. Even Aerosmith – Aerosmith! – have got into the act, singing the praises of pink on their latest waxing. That's pink as in "Surrender the pink", a punning reference to ... Well, never mind.

I could go on, but does any person of taste really want to be reminded of last year's summer collections, or the colour scheme of Julie Burchill's Brighton pad?

This is no pigment of the imagination. The other half are plainly – and playfully – thinking pink again. So: what are we going to do about it?

I find myself agreeing with Derek Bentley. Let 'em have it. Now, now. Please. Tossing your sex toys at me does nothing except add to my collection. I'm also aware that no hue is afforded permanent stability of meaning. Why, according to Cassell's *Queer Companion*, before the First World War pink was even considered a shade masculine. Being a variation on red (valour, courage), pink was linked with boys, not boys: with blood and the spilling of blood. Back then blue was feminine, and our sort, like Disney's *Pocahontas*, painted with all the colours of the wind. Or at least three: green, violet, lavender. Suits you, sir, but not, definitely not, for public consumption.

Times change. Indeed

they do. Pink was shocking. Pink was hot. Pink was perky and perty. But now, after 30 years of that crazy little thing called Out, shouldn't we pause and ask: is a pastel that plays best on suckling pigs really the right shade for a mature political movement?

Sure, pink used to be provocative. Smart idea, inverting the symbol of our supposed deviancy and making it our own: the pink triangle insignia. Others were forced to wear in the concentration camps (Oh, those wagging Nazis! They knew it clashed with everything!) Anyhow, you understand: from Triumph of the Will to Triumph of the Willie.

Times change. Hang on to pink, and it's horribly possible to end up the spiritual counterpart of Barbara Cartland. Pink, after all, is also being eroded from "within". Red, red ribbons and rainbow flags certainly suggest a wish to broaden a restricted palette. Honestly. Here we are, the mavens of mix 'n' match, and we're stuck with any colour as long as it's you-know-what. Pink pounds, pink politics, pink tax, pink paperbacks. Pink accountants. Pink lawyers. The pink (showbiz) squares in *Trivial Pursuit*. From the concentration camps to questions about *Schindler's List*. There's even, for heaven's sake, a Pink Paper.

Times change. Face the future. (Orange – good news for Judith Chalmers.) At this stage we'd be better off with Khmer Rouge. There's no threat, no juice, no joy left in pink. Besides, I look vile in it. Apart from bridesmaids and Barbie, everyone does. Bat your lashes at any Gay Pride march for confirmation and consider the virtues of rebranding. It worked for Pepsi, it can work for us. We're no longer content to settle for the perception of being second best. The millennium approaches and ...

It's time to give pink back to blanckmange, your incontinent Granny's matinee jacket, babies' squeezable little cheeks (both sets).

Pink is done. How can one tell? Because heterosexuals' parodies and satires are so much more pointed, so much more amusing than ours. So, can we just, like, get over it, and muse upon being all white on the night, or being in the navy, or going through the rainbow rather than over it? There may be no cure for this colour-blindness, but couldn't we at least admit that it's sometimes best to be out of the pink, rather than in?

Millions of men suffer from impotence, but a new survey suggests that even those who summon the courage to see their GP may receive no help. Phillip Hodson reports.

The poet John Betjeman suffered: "My sex is no longer rampant." Sir Anthony Buck apparently suffered: "It took two years for the marriage to be consummated with wife Bienvenida." Even James Bond has suffered: "For an hour in that room alone with Le Chiffre the certainty of impotence had been beaten into him and a scar had been left that could only be healed by experience."

A pity they didn't live to see the current trend of impotence research and development.

This should be an exciting time for erections. There is a range of new products – at least one of them available on the NHS – or in the pipeline, to help most men. However, the conclusion of a survey of 432 patients and 194 partners, published on behalf of the Impotence Association, is significantly deflating.

The chairman of the association, Dr Alan J Riley, has estimated that up to 5 million British men suffer from some form of "erectile dysfunction" yet only 10 per cent receive any form of treatment.

We now learn that of those seeking help, one in four neglects to visit their doctor, preferring to trust to commercial alternatives such as sprays, herbs and "energy rings". Of those who do visit the surgery, 23 per cent get no treatment whatsoever. Of those who do visit the doctor and get treatment, a massive 58 per cent come away dissatisfied.

Does this matter? Well, 62 per cent of sufferers reported lowered self-esteem and some feelings of depression; 15 per cent had trouble making new relationships; 14 per cent said impotence had damaged their long-term partnerships; 10 per cent thought it had even spoiled their relationship with the doctor, while a quarter of the respondents said impotence reduced their overall quality of life by up to 80 per cent.

Allan Bennet – in his 50s – wrote to me last year to express frustration with the system: "I



fearing in silence as only "real" men can.

In fact, if the male sex were quoted on the stock exchange, today's price would be in trouble again. Poor educational attainments and falling sperm counts are one thing. But to pass up a National Health aphrodisiac when it is lawful and licensed seems more than perverse.

As men live longer, compete with women harder and consume more health and grooming products, impotence is, in any case, set to spread rather than diminish. Up to a third of men over the age of 45 experience some symptoms of impotence, and up to two-thirds of those aged 75 and over. Longer life spans usually means more heart and hypertension problems. These may cause impotence directly, or as a result of taking medication for the conditions. The same is true of depression – a common enough feature of mid-life crisis. Both the illness, and remedies such as Prozac, can reduce libido and affect sexual performance. New drugs to counter baldness, such as Propecia, also carry some risk of impotence.

Nor do "old" drugs such as alcohol and nicotine help. Men who consume more than 40 units of booze a week are likely to deliver little or no sexual thrill. It has been shown that smoking two high-tar cigarettes, one after the other, reduces blood-flow in the penis by about a third. And the *Independent on Sunday*'s campaign to promote cannabis has to answer concerns that up to 20 per cent of long-term cannabis users may become impotent.

Even if you are trying to lead a drug-free, well-exercised lifestyle, there is little prospect of escape. The latest significant cause of impotence among younger men turns out to be "bicycle-riding", at least according to Dr Irwin Goldstein of Dallas, Texas (his website: <http://www.nd.edu/~ktrembl/www-bike/BCY/men.bikes.html>), who sees six such patients a week. He claims that hard cycle-saddles on sports bikes are responsible for reducing penile blood flow by up to 66 per cent, and even the softer versions reduce blood supply to the region by a third.

So it is just as well that we live in a period replete with remedies. Injectable prostaglandins (blood-stream messengers) such as Caverject are

a special boon for diabetes and stroke patients. Men cross their legs when you mention injections, but the sensation is said to be no more than a "small prick", according to Dr Geoff Hackett of Keele University, who ran tests for five years.

To those critics who say doctors are yet again "interfering with nature", he replied: "Spontaneous intercourse isn't very common in most 20-year-old marriages. My studies show that 39 per cent of patients with diabetes are permanently impotent. Over 50 per cent of stroke patients are impotent. And most of those with spinal damage who can't walk and have sometimes little else to live for are impotent. Not only will many of these sufferers be able to resume sexual activity, the quality of their erections is likely to exceed anything they experienced since boyhood."

Another version of this compound (called Muse) will be available later this month in pellet form for needle-phobes.

In addition to these treatments, there is a vast array of hard or semi-hard penile rods and implants, some with external bulb-inflators, which may be fitted by a plastic surgeon, in addition to hand-applied pumps, splints and bands.

But in all this discussion of prosthetics and sexual chemistry where is the human touch?

Already we have a consumer-friendly alpha-1 blocker impotence remedy (called Erectone) which, unlike Caverject and Muse, does not induce erection in the absence of sexual stimulation. We're about to see an orally-active compound (Sildenafil) whose trials are showing great success.

But popping a pill is never going to be the complete answer. Men, after all, are only half the equation. We already know that more than a third of the partners of impotent men have sexual problems of their own. So, despite the problems highlighted in this survey, the future still looks good for talking treatments and Related: it is also looking good for foreplay.

Phillip Hodson is a trustee of the Impotence Association, a sex therapist and a fellow of the British Association for Counselling. The results of the survey will be published in full on 28 January. To contact the Impotence Association, write to PO Box 10296, London SW17 7ZD.

THE INDEPENDENT

IN ASSOCIATION WITH

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INDEPENDENT
ON SUNDAY

Opening doors on a private drama

They are two very different women, but they share painful personal experience of eating disorders. Between them they provide a comprehensive and provocative insight into the subject as you are likely to get, says Angela Neustatter.

All the statistics told Peggy Claude-Pierre that her daughter Nikki, skeletal and suicidal, would be lucky to live another three days. It was at this point that she wondered whether she had the physical stamina to cope: "I think it is lucky I didn't live in the US, where I could have got a handgun."

She had already lived through a year of her eldest daughter Kirsten's life-threatening anorexia, had managed with 24-hour caring and a constant countering of the negative feelings, self-loathing of her body and herself that Kirsten had voiced, to bring her back to health and rationality. Three months later she realised that Nicole, in her mid-teens, was showing signs of an eating disorder. "I began having an unhealthy fear about her," says Claude-Pierre. "I knew intuitively, although I tried to deny it, that Nikki's illness was a nightmare, many times worse than Kirsten's had been."

She sits now at a table overlooking the rooftops of London, recalling the nights she sat on the bathroom floor beside her daughter Nikki's bedroom, will-

ing the icy cold of the stone to keep her awake because she feared that if she slept and left her daughter alone, "her life could slip away". During the day she drove Nikki around as a distraction, stopping regularly at restaurants to say she was hungry, then putting scraps of food from her plate on to the table in the hope that Nikki might take them. There was the evening they scoured town for a banana because Nikki decided this was what she wanted, but she would only accept an overripe one, where just a fraction of the fruit was edible.

Claude-Pierre acknowledges: "I was held an emotional hostage", but something in her "gave" that the only way to get her daughter through was with unconditional approval and

love. "At the same time, to do this I had to detach myself emotionally, because she would sometimes spit hate and vitriol at me." She stayed with Nicole 24 hours a day, chatting to her by day, sitting by her bed at night recalling happy memories – anything to prevent the negative thoughts that she believes drive those with eating disorders ever farther and farther into their private despair.

And it is history now. After 18 months Nikki was cured, and what Claude-Pierre learnt convinced her that much of what is commonly presumed about eating disorders is mistaken or superficial. She dismisses the idea that the ending of her marriage shortly before her daughter through was with

unconditional approval and rigid regimes work, and her conviction led to the setting up of the Montreux Clinic in Canada. This now famous place, which has treated hundreds of people with eating disorders, is also the subject of Claude-Pierre's new book.

Predictably, there have been sceptically raised eyebrows at her relentless rebuttal of medical theories. Claude-Pierre's soft, coaxing voice does not fully disguise a steely, driven quality, the thing you imagine made it possible for her to stay sane through two-and-a-half years of her children's living death. She says that in four years of monitoring patients who complete the treatment, there has not been one relapse. But she will not give figures, and slides quickly on to other matters.



Inside stories: Peggy Claude-Pierre and Mary Hornbacher



Photographs: Rui Xavier; Mark Trockman

vomit. When I returned everything was calm and I felt very clean."

There followed "15 years of bingeing, barfing, starving, needles and tubes and terror and rage, and medical crises and personal failure." Yet, although it is this very negativity for which Claude-Pierre believes she has a panacea, you wonder whether Hornbacher, whose book is underscored with a dogged, infantile cry of "won't ... can't ..." would be too great a challenge. For it is this obduracy, willingness to die rather than be treated, that makes the medical profession say cure is impossible; at best you can manage the illness. Hornbacher puts the dilemma neatly when she says: "Dying is exciting. Eating disorders provide a private drama."

But Hornbacher is no longer starving herself to death, although she absolutely refutes the idea of cure: "I do not have a happy ending ... I cannot end it with assurances of my own triumph over adversity."

And although Hornbacher is closer than Claude-Pierre to the cynics who are unconvinced by the idea of a softly-softly, love and comfort cure, the two women have converged in that Kirsten and Nicole are cured and, 10 years on, are working at their mother's clinic. And Hornbacher, now 23, is at least healthy and distanced enough to have written her life story.

The Secret Language of Eating Disorders (Doubleday, £16.99). *Wasted* will be published by HarperCollins on 6 April, at £12.99.

19/OBITUARIES

talk

Roger Clark

Roger Albert Clark, rally driver: born Narborough, Leicestershire 5 August 1939; MBE 1979; married 1965 Judith Barr (two sons); died Leicester 12 January 1998.

Roger Clark, a legendary character in the world of rallying, was Britain's most successful driver in the 1960s and 1970s. Many think him the best of all time.

Although justly famous for twice winning Britain's RAC International Rally in Ford Escorts – in 1972 (with Tony Mason as his co-driver) and in 1976 (with Stuart Pegg), in a glittering career he won 25 other major international rallies in Britain, Europe, Canada, and South Africa. For two decades he was not only the best of British, but was warmly respected by rivals all over the world.

Once he was established in "works" teams in the mid-1960s, his flamboyant driving and his refusal to be overawed by any event, car or rival, changed the face of British rallying. Before this time British stars, in general, had been well-to-do motor traders, not used to loose surfaces and aggressive competition from Scandinavians. Clark, by contrast, was young, fit, well-balanced and skilful on all surfaces – and not at all impressed by any other driver.

Not that he ever knew – or

cared about – the origin of his superlative talents, which he accepted as there, built-in and supreme, to be enjoyed and exploited. He often said, at the chat shows and interviews he so readily gave: "I don't care how sideways I am. As long as I'm not actually looking out of the back window at the time, I should be able to get it all back into line."

In sport, and in most things which ever attracted his attention, he usually took the simple approach, yet far too many people missed the deep thinker hidden away behind the affable front. Analysts trying to dig deeper were airy dismissed, for throughout his career Clark took a straightforward view of what life, and competition motoring, had to offer. Weight training, or any vigorous exercise, was anathema to him. As he freely admitted: "All the exercise I need is to walk down to the pub from home" – he was certainly more at home close to a bar than to a gymnasium.

Clark was born just before the Second World War in Leicestershire, where his father ran a small garage business. By the late 1950s, when he left Hinckley Grammar School with 5 O levels, but with much more interest in sport, the business had taken on several new-car franchises. With his brother Stan, he then joined the family business which would be his

sheet anchor for 30 years. Starting at the bottom, with oily hands and a growing knowledge of the workings of the motor car, he took up motorsport in cars best described as old bangers, but then shot to fame in British club rallies with a BMC Mini Cooper. He forged, too, a long-time partnership with Jim Porter, who stayed on as his co-driver for 20 years. Bizarrely, though, Porter did not share in either of his RAC Rally wins: he was working for the organisers on both events.

Except for one category success (in a Rover 2000) in the 1965 Monte Carlo Rally, his early "works" drives were unsuccessful, but after he joined Ford (his first full season being in 1966), his sheer driving pace, and ability, were obvious.

Clark, Ford and (from 1968)

the fastest special-engined Ford Escorts were inseparable until the end of 1979 and even in the 1980s (when his factory-backed career was over) he would still take every opportunity of driving one again. When the London-Sydney Marathon "retrospective", for classic cars, was held in the early 1990s, it was the Clark/Escort combination which set almost every fastest time.

Throughout the 1970s he

was a permanent, and much-admired, member of the celebrated Ford factory rally team,

which prepared cars for

others to use in rallying.

– Graham Robson



Clark: 'I don't care how sideways I am'

Professor C. J. F. Dowsett

Charles James Frank Dowsett (Charles Downing), Armenian scholar: born London 2 January 1924; Lecturer in Armenian, School of Oriental and African Studies, London 1954-65; Reader 1965; Calouste Gulbenkian Professor of Armenian Studies, Oxford University 1965-91 (Emeritus) Fellow, Pembroke College, Oxford 1965-91 (Emeritus); FBA 1977; married 1949 Friedel Lapuner (died 1984); died Oxford 8 January 1998.

C. J. F. Dowsett was not only for 26 years Calouste Gulbenkian Professor of Armenian Studies at Oxford University but also, as "Charles Downing", the children's author of the delightfully retold *Tales of the Hodja* (1964, illustrated by the Greek cartoonist Papas) and the collections *Russian Tales and Legends* (1956) and *Armenian Folktales and Fables* (1972).

He was a man of exceptional ability and versatility. His total lack of pretension, his ever-youthful sense of enquiry and his playful delight in the quirks of language meant, however, that one was never overwhelmed by his immense learning and extraordinarily wide range of reading. It is not surprising that he had a wonderful rapport with children.

At Peterhouse, Cambridge, from 1947 to 1950, Dowsett changed to Comparative Philology for Part II of the Tripos after reading Russian and German for Part I. This happily brought him into contact with Professor (later Sir) Harold Bailey, who first introduced him to Armenian. Bailey, who was a scholar with phenomenal knowledge of Indo-European (and many other) languages, was to remain a lifelong friend, and in honour of his 90th birthday in 1989 Dowsett presented him with an Armenian Folktale and Fables (1961). Subsequently he collaborated with John Carswell in the publication of the Kürtahya Armenian Tiles (glazed tiles in the Armenian Cathedral, Jerusalem), Dowsett being responsible for the volume dealing with the Armenian inscriptions, *The Inscribed Tiles* (1972).

But his *magnum opus*, which fortunately saw publication some six months before his death, was a major study of the multilingual poet Sayat Nova (*Sayat Nova: an 18th-century troubadour*, 1997). Dowsett's wide range of linguistic abilities, combined with his deep love of poetry and music, made him the ideal person to write on this poet, who composed with equal facility in Armenian, Georgian, Azerbaijani and Russian.



Dowsett: inspiring

Nova's example, Charles Dowsett would, especially in his later years, every now and then send his friends a sheaf of his own multilingual poems, proverbs or limericks; written in an even wider range of languages, these were often illustrated, or even set to music, by himself. He was particularly proud that the *Times* had once published a poem of his written in Lithuanian, which he had composed in honour of some sporting event with Lithuanian participants.

His next projected book was to have been a study of Lithuanian wedding songs.

– Sebastian Brock

Caroline Bingham

Caroline Margery Conyers Worsdell, historian and biographer: born York 7 February 1938; Research Fellow, Royal Holloway and Bedford New College 1985-87; married 1958 Andrew Bingham (one daughter; marriage dissolved 1972); died Caterham, Surrey 8 January 1998.



Bingham: Scottish histories

Caroline Bingham made her name as a historian and biographer with an interest in Scottish history. She never held, or wanted to hold, an academic post, preferring to retain her independence even if it entailed a measure of financial insecurity. Yet, although she wrote for the general reader rather than the specialist, when it came to her research and writing, she set herself the highest of standards. Her first published work, in 1968, was *The Making of a King: the early years of James VI*

and I, and she returned to this theme 10 years later with a two-volume study which covered James's rule in England as well as Scotland, *James VI of Scotland* (1979) and *James I of England* (1981). She thereby made a significant contribution to the re-evaluation of the first Stuart ruler of Great Britain, usually (and erroneously) dismissed as a windbag and potboiler.

Other works covered the entire spectrum of Scottish history, from the earliest times down to the Union, but Bingham also shifted her attention south of the border and wrote a life of Edward II (1973) as well as *The Crowned Lions* (1978), which dealt with the early Plantagenet rulers of England. She resisted the temptation to add yet another biography of Mary, Queen of Scots to what is already a more than sufficient number. In *Darnley* (1995), she preferred to bring out of the

shadows Mary's husband Lord Darnley, a distinctly unattractive character, but one who, by virtue of his birth and marriage, was a person of consequence.

She was born Caroline Worsdell, in 1938. From a Quaker family, she later converted to Roman Catholicism. One of the factors which impelled her to take this step was the desire to get back behind the Reformation and rejoin the historic Church. She was deeply attached to the Latin mass, which had its roots in the earliest centuries of Christianity, and felt betrayed when the modernisers turned their backs on the past and substituted vernacular versions lacking in both dignity and the authenticity which time alone can confer.

She was educated at Cheltenham Ladies' College and Bristol University, where she took an honours degree in History. Caroline Bingham derived great benefit, as well as enjoyment, from her undergraduate studies, and was therefore delighted to be asked in later years to write the centenary history of a pioneer institution in the field of women's education, the *History of Royal Holloway College 1886-1986* (1987). She was enchanted by this effervescent late-Victorian version of the Château de Chambord, crowning the heights above

Egham in Surrey, and much appreciated the award of a Jubilee Fellowship by the college in 1985. This gave her easy access to the archives as well as to students and staff, with whom she had warm and friendly relations.

The biography of Darnley was Bingham's last published work and further cemented her reputation. By the time she finished it, she was suffering from renewed attacks of the cancer which eventually killed her, but she showed a determination worthy of her Quaker ancestors by completing a life of Robert the Bruce which will be a worthy memorial. She also, in her last months, achieved another ambition, that of reading the whole of Proust before she died.

Caroline Bingham never thrust herself forward and was inclined to understate her abilities. Yet an innate shyness did not prevent her from winning the love and admiration of a wide circle of friends, for she was not

only a woman of striking beauty and elegance but had an unaffected charm and sweetness of nature. Although she spent the greater part of her life in London, and relished visits to theatres, galleries and restaurants, she had a genuine love for the countryside. She also had a soft spot for animals, especially dogs.

Although she was caught up, as we all are, in secular affairs and the struggle to earn a living, she never lost sight of the spiritual realities behind the material world. In a lecture in 1986 on Thomas Holloway, the founder of the college which bears his name, she stressed that, whatever the appearances, he did not "lay waste his powers" and did not suffer from the atrophy of imagination and loss of ability to see visions which Wordsworth lamented as the cost of constant attention to mundane matters.

Bingham could have been writing about herself. It is a most appropriate epitaph.

– Roger Lockyer

At Oxford, where the Chair is associated with a Fellowship at Pembroke College, Dowsett had a small but steady stream of students, mostly graduates, many of whom are now distinguished scholars teaching in universities in both Europe and North America. His graduate classes were not exactly conventional, and might well have been nonplussed today's Teaching Quality Assessors. Barely would a line or two of text have been read before some etymological puzzle would emerge, and then each member of the class would be directed to a different dictionary in the subsequent chase for cognates.

The dictionaries might be of Old Irish to Albanian – all were conveniently present on his crowded shelves. Romany etymologies were a particular favourite. At the end of the class, although

Brian Keaulana, a fellow lifeguard and now movie stuntman, said of her, "Rell was the greatest in surfing, swimming, sailing, spearfishing – but more than that, she was the embodiment of the aloha spirit."

Her ashes will be scattered tomorrow out on the lineup at her favourite break in Makaha, Sun had expressed the wish that at her funeral mourners should not speak of her as passing on to a better place.

"There's no better place than Makaha," she said. "This is heaven on earth."

– Andy Martin

Rell Sunn

Rell Sunn, surfer: born Makaha, Oahu 1950; married Dave Parmenter (one daughter); died Makaha 2 January 1998.

Rell Sunn was the modern archetype of the Hawaiian water-woman. She was the female answer to Duke Kahanamoku, the mother of women's surfing in the 20th century.

She harked back to an ancient Hawaiian tradition, exemplified by such semi-legendary figures as Hina'ikamala and Kele'a who, in the era

before European contact, were reputed to be better surfers than men. When Captain Cook sailed into the islands for the first time, he noticed that men and women were equally adept in the field of water sports. The 19th-century evangelists soon put a stop to all such pagan pursuits. It was Sunn who put women back in the water.

Born in Makaha on the west side of Oahu, of a Chinese-Hawaiian family, she learned to surf at the age of four and first competed at 14. In the absence of a women's category, she would surf against men. She was

formative in the creation of a parallel women's circuit and helped establish the Women's Professional Surfing Association in 1975, in which she was briefly ranked world No 1. She became Hawaii's first female lifeguard and learnt to put up with some of the men she rescued running away in shock and humiliation at being saved by a woman.

But beyond her iconic status among surfing women – which earned her a place in the Surfing Hall of Fame in Huntington Beach, California – she also figured significantly in the Hawaiian cultural renaissance

of the last few decades. She crewed in the *Hokule'a*, the traditional double-hulled canoe that mirrored the migratory path of the vessels that brought a millennium or so ago. And she developed a project enabling underprivileged children to sail around the islands and thereby acquire a sense of their Hawaiian identity. She also ran an annual Menehune (little people) Surf Meet and had the charisma and the persuasiveness to set up sponsorships for up-and-coming young Hawaiians. She not only loved her sport,

but was gifted in communicating her passion to others, working as a surf reporter on KCCN radio and lyrically hymning the old wooden longboard in a Channel 4 documentary, *Walking on Water*. She put up a brave fight against cancer for 14 years, always maintaining that surfing was the best therapy. When she lost all her hair through chemotherapy, she wore a swimming cap on her first day back in the water, but felt deeply embarrassed in this most style-conscious of milieux. The nice day the whole Makaha crew were wearing swimming caps too.

Brian Keaulana, a fellow lifeguard and now movie stuntman, said of her, "Rell was the greatest in surfing, swimming, sailing, spearfishing – but more than that, she was the embodiment of the aloha spirit."

Her ashes will be scattered tomorrow out on the lineup at her favourite break in Makaha, Sun had expressed the wish that at her funeral mourners should not speak of her as passing on to a better place.

"There's no better place than Makaha," she said. "This is heaven on earth."

– Andy Martin

BIRTHS, MARRIAGES & DEATHS

DEATHS

MATHEWS *Obituaries for Gazette Births, Marriages & Deaths (Births, Adoptions, Marriages, Deaths, Deaths, Memorial services, Weddings, Anniversaries, In Memoriam, Deaths)* should be written to the Gazette Editor, The Independent, 1 Canary Wharf, London E14 5DL, telephoned to 071-971 2012 24-hour answering machine 071-293 2001 or faxed to 071-293 2001 VAT-free and charged at £10.50 a line. VAT-free (including postage and packing) for first-class postage and handling. Please enclose stamp.

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Changing of the Guard
to Household Cavalry Mounted Regiment from the Queen's Life Guards at Horse Guards, London

Birthdays
Mr Colin Banks, graphic designer, 66; Sir Alastair Blair, former Writer to the Signet, 82; Air Marshal Sir Robert Cullen, 82; Sir Robin Dunn, former Lord Justice of Appeal, 80; Professor John Endter, physicist, 67; Professor Roy Foster, Professor of Irish History, Oxford University, 49; The Right Rev Michael Henley, Bishop of St Andrews, Dunkeld and Dunblane, 68; Professor Sir Peter Hirsch, metallurgist, 73; Professor Elaine Murphy, psychogeriatrician, 51; Mr Richard Ormond, Director, National Maritime Museum, 59; Miss Nadine Peppard, race relations consultant, 76; Mr Keith Shackleton, artist and naturalist, 75; Professor Sir Frederick Stewart, geologist, 82; Lord Thomson of Monifieth, 82; Sir Alan Titchmarsh, 58; Mr Cliff Thorburn, snooker player, 50; Miss Christine Truman, tennis player, 57; Lady Marina Valency, art critic, 60; Professor Sir William Wade OC, former Master, Gonville and Caius, Cambridge, 80; Mr James Watson, chairman, Watson & Philip plc, 63; Mr Michael White, theatre and film producer, 62.

Anniversaries
Births: François-Joseph Talma, actor-manager, 1763; André Michelini, maker, 1853; Ethel Merman (Zimmerman), singer and actress, 1909; Deaths: Edmund Spenser, poet, 1599; Carole Lombard, actress, killed in an air crash 1942; Arturo Toscanini, conductor, 1883; Robert Jenison Van de Graaff, nuclear physicist, 1967. On this day: Ivan the Terrible, first Russian Tsar, was crowned, 1547; the British expedition led by Ernest Shackleton reached the South Magnetic Pole, 1909; in the United States, the 18th Amendment was ratified, which prohibited the sale of alcohol; 1920; the Gulf War started with the launch of Operation Desert Storm, when allied air attacks were made on Iraq and occupied Kuwait, 1991. Today is the Feast Day of St Berard and Others, St Turse, St Henry of Cockfield, St Honoratus of Arles, St Marcellus I, pope and St Priscilla.

Lectures
National Gallery: Mari Griffith, "Courtauld Loans II"; Manet, The Seine à Argenteuil", 1pm.
Victoria and Albert Museum: Christine Ridings, "Rococo and Chinoiserie", 2.30pm.

Synagogue services
Details of synagogue services to be held tomorrow may be obtained by telephoning the following. Sabbath begins in London at 4.00pm.
United Synagogues: 0181-342 8899.
Federation of Synagogues: 0181-202 2263. Union of Liberal and Progressive Synagogues: 0171-580 1643. Reform Synagogues of Great Britain: 0181-247 4731. Spanish and Portuguese Jewish Congregation: 0171-289 2573. New London Synagogue (Masorti): 0171-320 1024.

Grant of indefinite leave to remain in the United Kingdom under section 4(1) of the Immigration Act 1971
had to be "given" in writing to the person affected, and could accordingly be cancelled or revoked until it was communicated.

Stamping in passport
The Court of Appeal dismissed the appeal of Robin Rafiq against the decision of the Immigration Appeal Tribunal, which had reversed an Adjudicator

20/LEADER & LETTERS

The message from Dudley? Mr Blair still doesn't know what happens next



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Fax 0171 293 2056; e-mail: letters@independent.co.uk.
E-mail correspondents are asked to give a postal address.
Letters may be edited for length and clarity.

Battle for Bart's

Sir: In his report on the future of London's hospitals ("Bart's may still close", 13 January), Jeremy Laurance rightly draws attention to the inexcusable delay by the Government in publishing the recommendations of the London Strategic Review. The report by the independent panel was submitted to ministers in early November, and the uncertainty surrounding the future of world-class teaching hospitals such as Bart's and Guy's must come to an end, for the sake of patients and NHS staff.

If the review panel has not made any specific recommendations on whether Bart's should close or whether Guy's accident and emergency department should stay open, then ministers must make their own decisions in the light of the abundance of evidence available to them. This is a government that prides itself on its ability to make hard choices, and it is time to stop sitting on the fence.

SIMON HUGHES MP
(Southwark North and Bermondsey, Lib Dem)
House of Commons

Sir: Jeremy Laurance reports that the consultant staff of the Royal Hospitals NHS Trust voted, in a ballot before Christmas, in favour of merging the trust's five hospitals at a single site, at the Royal London Hospital in Whitechapel.

That ballot was organised by the council of which I am chairman. It produced a substantial majority in favour of the single-site option, but only if it is of sufficient scale to support the current and predicted secondary and tertiary clinical workload.

The definition of scale is where the debate hinges: it is not simply about the number of sites. Dr JOHN P MONSON
Chairman, Joint Medical Council, Royal Hospitals Trust
St Bartholomew's Hospital
London EC1

Sir: The recent vote of the consultant staff at the Royal Hospitals NHS Trust's five sites (Bart's, Royal London, Mile End, London Chest and Queen Elizabeth Children's Hospitals), supported a single-site option only if clinical facilities and bed numbers were sufficient to support current and expected future levels of clinical activity.

This activity is understood by many of us to be far greater than that which can be achieved in a hospital of the proposed size



incorporating 1200-1300 beds at Whitechapel. Not only is London now no longer over-bedded, but indeed may be subject to severe bed shortages, particularly in areas of very heavy demand such as the East End.

The Trust's consultants further voted that were adequate facilities not available in the planned rebuild, then consideration should be given to the original two-site option, maintaining St Bartholomew's Hospital.

Only with the continuation of clinical activity at this hospital, which is currently thriving, will we have the resources and flexibility to provide first-rate health care to our local population. This will also allow us to maintain our excellence as a national and international centre.

Professor ASHLEY
GROSSMAN
Chairman
Dr DUNCAN DYMOND
Dr JANE ANDERSON
Deputy Chairmen
Medical Council of
St Bartholomew's Hospital
London EC1

Sir: The recent vote of the consultant staff at the Royal Hospitals NHS Trust's five sites (Bart's, Royal London, Mile End, London Chest and Queen Elizabeth Children's Hospitals), supported a single-site option only if clinical facilities and bed numbers were sufficient to support current and expected future levels of clinical activity.

This activity is understood by many of us to be far greater than that which can be achieved in a hospital of the proposed size

Teachers were right

Sir: When the National Curriculum was introduced teachers were given an impossible task. When they complained they were denigrated by the politicians who invented a form of political police called the Office for Standards in Education to force schools and teachers into compliance.

Teachers were condemned as inefficient, lazy and un-cooperative, and schools were named and shamed.

Mr Blunkett has now admitted that the National Curriculum was overburdened, misdirected and is in need of urgent change to make it manageable and effective ("Blunkett gives schools more time for three Rs", 14 January).

Perhaps an apology is in order.

PETER COLEMAN
Headteacher
Goodrich Primary School
London SE22

Sir: The reason schools need to spend more time teaching chil-

dren to read is that they spend all their time at home watching television. Forget cannabis, tobacco, alcohol, lead in petrol. Television is the drug which has rotted all our minds. Education cannot compete.

JOHN CAMPBELL
London W1

Sir: While pavement cycling can present hazards to pedestrians, there are no reliable statistics to prove that it is as dangerous as is claimed. The figures cited in your article "£20 fines for 'Lycra louts' who pedal on pavement" (14 January) do not indicate where the collisions took place, or which party was at fault.

All the figures can tell us is that bikes pose less of a threat to pedestrians than cars do, as in the same period there were

more than 35,000 reported collisions between cars and pedes-

trians.

DANIEL JOHNSON
London W1

Sir: As cycling commuters and car-owners we welcome reports that the Government is considering fines for cyclists who ride on the pavement. We would also welcome fines for cyclists who ride at night without lights. Cyclists should be responsible road-users and we are increasingly angry with that small group of riders whose antics give the vast majority a bad name.

However, we would welcome news of fines for others too: motorists who park in cy-

cle lanes; drivers who turn left without indicating, running the risk of knocking riders off their bikes; pedestrians with a death wish who walk out in front of cyclists without looking.

We all have to co-exist on the roads, and more people will be encouraged on to their bikes if they can be confident that motorists and pedestrians are more bicycle-aware.

CAROL RAWLINGS
NATHALIE SCHORBON
Charlton, Kent

Sir: As cycling commuters and car-owners we welcome reports that the Government is considering fines for cyclists who ride on the pavement. We would also welcome fines for cyclists who ride at night without lights. Cyclists should be responsible road-users and we are increasingly angry with that small group of riders whose antics give the vast majority a bad name.

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cle lanes; drivers who turn left without indicating, running the risk of knocking riders off their bikes; pedestrians with a death wish who walk out in front of cyclists without looking.

Why is the Government so anxious to rush to this vote in May when it has so many more urgent priorities: health, education, welfare? If the Lords vote is truly attributable to a "handful of unelected, hereditary peers", as John Prescott says, then they seem to be more mindful of the democratic process than elected ministers.

DEBORAH TOMPKINSON
Maidenhead, Berkshire

Sir: The election of a mayor for London is of interest to more than just Londoners. Such a momentous, and expensive, decision should not be rushed.

In requiring the referendum to be delayed until eight weeks after publication of the legislation proposing it, the House of Lords have not indulged in an "anti-democratic vote" nor have they denied Londoners the chance to make a choice

(report, 14 January). On the contrary, they have upheld the democratic process by insisting that voters be allowed time for informed discussion.

Let the Government administer

that these islands are a patchwork of nations, sovereignties and cultures. A Council of the Isles must be open to all the Celtic nations in these isles. Cornwall and the Isle of Man need to have a place along with the rest.

PAUL R DUNBAR
Press Officer, Mebyon Kernow
Liskeard, Cornwall

Sir: Tony Blair is supposed to be able to read the mood of the country, yet on the same day that the report on air pollution is made public (14 January) we read that he is planning to fly to Washington on Concorde, the least environmentally friendly aeroplane.

V NELSON
Bristol

Above the smog

Sir: In the debate on human cloning (report, 12 January), we never hear about one very important matter: a clone is not the same age as its source. The

body is indeed genetically identical, but will grow up in a different world.

JOHN BEATTIE
Glasgow

Sir: The trouble with newspapers is there's no news. It's all opinion and, er, columnists ...



Today I am bringing you a bit more of the extraordinary case in the High Court in which a newspaper reader is taking his own favourite paper to court. George BR Higgs claims that the *Daily Post* is no longer a newspaper in the real sense of the word and should not be allowed to call itself such.

Higgs has just taken the witness stand.

Counsel: Now, Mr Higgs, you have been reading the *Daily Post* for how long?

Higgs: About 20 years.

Counsel: Have you noticed any changes in the *Daily Post* over those years?

Higgs: Yes. It has acquired a Property section, a Motoring section, a Jobs section, a Media

section, an Appointments section, a Travel section, a Holiday section, an Education section, a Gardening section ...

Counsel: Just a moment, just a moment. What is the difference between a Jobs section and an Appointments section? They sound the same to me.

Higgs: Oh, they are, but one is downmarket and one is upmarket. The same with overseas sections: Holiday is downmarket and Travel is upmarket. Cars is down. Motoring is upmarket ...

Judge: Up which market?

Counsel: The marketplace of public taste, m'lud.

Judge: Ah. Has the public got any taste?

Counsel: No, my Lord.

Judge: I see. Carry on, and try

to make it easier to understand.

Counsel: Now, all these sections which have sprouted in the *Daily Post* over the years, what do you do with them?

Higgs: I throw them away.

Counsel: Why cannot you use them for drawer-lining or fire-lighting?

Higgs: I cannot line drawers or light fires as fast as the *Daily Post* can produce sections.

Counsel: Hmm ... So what do you have left when you have thrown away the other sections? The news, surely?

Higgs: This used to be true. But there is no longer any news in the paper.

Counsel: What do you find instead?

Higgs: Columns of opinion.

Columns of commentary. Letters from readers. Obituaries. Reports of sports events.

Counsel: Surely sports reports are news items?

Higgs: Occasionally. But most sports items are merely speculation about the future. "England have good chance in West Indies". "Ian Wright doubtful for big match". "We can do it", says Seve. It's not news. It's useless gazing into a clouded crystal ball. The main so-called news pages are the same. Blair pledges himself to reform. Dome is fine, says Mandelson. Hague accuses government of backsliding. All those things are reports of what people have said, not of things that have happened. It is very rare to find news even in a good paper. That

is why I think newspapers should not be allowed to call themselves newspapers.

Counsel: All papers? Or just the *Daily Post*?

Higgs: *Daily Post* first. Rest later.

Judge: Mr Higgs ...

Higgs: Yes, m'lud?

Judge: I have been listening to this case with some attention, which is not a boast I often make, and an interesting question occurs to me. If this case ends in judgment for you against the *Post*, do you think it will be reported in the *Post*?

Higgs: No, my Lord. But I think it will be widely reported elsewhere.

Judge: The effect would be to damage the *Post*, would it not?

Higgs: Well, Richard Branson, perhaps ...?

Judge: Yes, I suppose so.

Judge: And drive its purchase price down?

Higgs: I am not intending to purchase the *Post* ...

Judge: Then what do you think should happen to it?

Higgs: Papers like the *Post* need a rethink, my Lord. New strategy, new ideas, new blood.

Judge: What kind of new blood?

Higgs: A new man with vision, perhaps, my Lord. From time to time a great man comes along who can change things. A Rothermere, a Murdoch, a Thomson, a Maxwell ... well, perhaps not a Maxwell.

Judge: And who would you nominate as such a man?

Higgs: Well, Richard Branson, perhaps ...?

Judge: But ...

Judge: But nothing! Case dismissed! See headline in tomorrow's *Post*: "Judge Refuses Branson In Court Outburst!"

And the next case please ...

The Bla
stroll ca

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21/COMMENT

pens next

The Blair and Murdoch stroll casts a bad shadow



ANDREW MARR
A DUBIOUS ALLIANCE

As an act of modern diplomacy it was one of the weirdest and most eloquent little events in years: Tony Blair and Alastair Campbell spent a serious amount of time in Tokyo discussing their need for the Japanese Prime Minister Ryutaro Hashimoto to apologise to Rupert Murdoch's Sun newspaper for his country's behaviour in the Second World War. Hashimoto, helped by Campbell, duly obliges and one of those all-time surrealistic headlines results: "Japan says sorry to the Sun". On a par with Britain apologising to the bulldog, or America saying sorry to the Bald Eagle.)

Now, you could argue that this deal is logical and benign. Most of the country stopped agonising about the Japanese years ago. But of the minority of still-angry and in some cases xenophobic protesters, many are Sun readers; up to now their sensitivities have been regularly prodded with a sharp stick by the editor of that organ. A fresh Japanese apology to Britain is deemed unnecessary; but Sun readers, still bristling in their dug-out, are another matter. Well, fine. If the article helps smooth the way for the Japanese emperor's state visit in May, so much the better.

But Number 10 under Blair is famously obsessed with *The Sun*, just as it was when inhabited by Margaret Thatcher and John Major. The current Prime Minister would argue, I suppose, that unlike his predecessors, he has a chance of taming the red-faced rant of British journalism, soothing and enticing it into a gentler and a more liberal world-view. Maybe, though its editor must know that in his market, blandness doesn't sell and populist, right-wing opinions do.

The Sun is only the beginning of this, however. Mr Blair's courtship of Murdoch began, I believe, as a damage-limitation exercise, meant to do no more than help New Labour get a fair playing-field in the 1997 election. But the flirtation blossomed into a genuine romance, and is now energetically consummated on a regular basis.

This may be sad, but it isn't surprising. The politics of Blair's Murdochism is crystal clear, and learnt from the Tories as well as from other leaders in Australia and the US: at all costs, get on side with the dominant media player and stay there. Murdoch is particularly useful to a government that wants to deal with him because (unlike at *The Independent* and other papers) he tells editors what to print. Deal with him and the deal affects all his journalists. It's very clean and efficient. From the point of view of the politician, it makes life simpler. You get his support. He gets your help with regulatory or other issues that touch his business.

Thus, this newspaper, like others, has been struggling to persuade Parliament to toughen the law on predatory pricing, the

anti-competitive technique whereby Murdoch dumps *The Times* at below what it costs to produce it in order to drive commercial competitors out of business.

Everyone acknowledges that it is happening, and no one professes to like it. Before the election, Labour saw a case for acting. Now, surprise, surprise, it doesn't. Many fine words have been uttered in Parliament on the subject. In the end, though, nothing will actually happen. Blair's own ministers say baldly and unequivocally that he will not cross Murdoch at any price. Some have the grace to look embarrassed when they tell us that whatever Murdoch wants, he'll get.

On the other hand, New Labour has shunned most of its natural supporters in the liberal press, and alienated most leading left or liberal journalists. All right, part of that is because such people are natural oppositionists, and have an almost biological need to disagree with Downing Street at all times. But the main reason is that the rest of the press isn't needed: New Labour has lines of communication to the public through broadcasting and the sleek yes-men on Murdoch papers.

Nor is it obvious that this deal will affect policy-making in other areas in the short term. Blair is forging ahead with welfare changes, constitutional reforms and educational changes just as he said he would. Across the board, you cannot say that this is a cynical or gutless Government, even if its chosen media delivery-system is an unattractive one.

There are, however, dangers here which even a Prime Minister as powerful as Tony Blair should ponder. First, clearly, there is the danger that Murdoch grows so powerful that his demands cannot be resisted in policy areas that stretch beyond his immediate business requirements. The whole question of the single currency is an obvious example. If the newspaper market is shrunk by predatory pricing, and then ITV loses ground badly to BSkyB when it goes head to head, Murdoch's personal power, already large, will be awesome.

Does Mr Blair really suppose he will be able to break from this embrace without affecting his judgement or reputation? Not if he has followed Murdoch's career, as he must have. The Australian Labor Party, which provided an early model for New Labour, became enmeshed in a "mates' economy" which was eventually seen as cynical and corrupting. In the US, the White House itself intervened to protect the tycoon's Fox TV from interference by the Federal Communications Commission to the humiliated fury of its employees, and Newt Gingrich's book deal with Murdoch did the Republicans huge harm with a public that was being replaced by Barcowsky's greasy palm when it sees one.

In the case of Britain, an intense and sticky private concentration of political and media power at the heart of the state is exactly the opposite of everything that New Labour professes to believe in as a reforming party. Remember, this whole issue is one that simply cannot be written about in *The Times* or openly discussed by the burgeoning Murdoch empire. It matters, yet it is forbidden territory except in newspapers like this one.

The Conservatives created huge public cynicism about politics because of the perception of private deals and special arrangements for chums and backers. Of all the strong political cards in his hand, including the size of his majority and the talents of some of his leading people, Blair has none that matters more than his reputation for openness and fairness. He has big ambitions for the country. But if it is really true that he dare not protest about an unfair misuse of commercial muscle, then Britain has become a littler country than it was before.

A decade on, and Pleat is back with Tottenham as director

of football, and Terry Venables is neither manager nor director of anything. On Wednesday it was announced in a statement from the Department of Trade and Industry that Venables had reached a settlement with its lawyers, agreeing to be banned from any directorship, or virtually any other relationship with a commercial operation, for seven years.

Accepting 19 charges of serious misconduct, all of which he had strenuously denied for the previous four years, Venables also agreed to pay half a million pounds of the DTI's costs.

Perhaps. But six weeks earlier, making a film about apprentice players at Spurs, I fell into conversation with Kate Hoey – now a Labour MP, but then a tutor on life skills to these wannabe soccer stars, some of whom badly needed them. Pleat, she told me, was on his way out. "The players don't like him," she said of the man who had taken the club to third place in the league and (unsuccessfully) to the FA Cup Final. "The rumour is that the chairman wants Terry Venables." And pretty soon, he had him. As one man trudged disconsolately out of the back door, his replacement – all smiles and charisma – arrived to fans' applause through the big gates at the front.

But as Sugar told his side of the story about how Venables had run the business side of the club, the optimal anti-million-

Just over 10 years ago, in November 1987, the manager of Tottenham Hotspur FC, David Pleat, was dismissed by the club following allegations about his private life. According to football writers Harry Harris and Steve Curry in their book *Venables, the Inside Story*, the Tottenham chairman, Irving Scholar, "sacked David Pleat with a particularly heavy heart. The fact that Pleat's personal problems came to a breaking point at the time that Venables was being replaced by Barcelona's Venables was merely coincidental".

In 1993, following the bust-up between Scholar's successor, Alan Sugar, and Terry Venables, which led to Venables' acrimonious departure from the club, the BBC's *Panorama* decided to investigate the feud between the two men. Mark Killick, the producer, says that he originally expected the story would be one of a nasty, scrub-faced Thatcherite businessman ousted a working-class hero. It'd be the bastards versus the romantics.

But as Sugar told his side of the story about how Venables had run the business side of the club, the optimal anti-million-

tor of football, and Terry Venables is neither manager nor director of anything. On Wednesday it was announced in a statement from the Department of Trade and Industry that Venables had reached a settlement with its lawyers, agreeing to be banned from any directorship, or virtually any other relationship with a commercial operation, for seven years.

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But as Sugar told his side of the story about how Venables had run the business side of the club, the optimal anti-million-

aire tale evaporated. To be replaced, as research continued, by the weird story of how – led on by an unscrupulous and plausible partner (Ashby) – Venables had broken nearly every rule in the book: first in raising money to buy a stake in Tottenham, and then in his management of the north London side. At one stage, Killick recalls, he sent a researcher down to Cardiff to look for a pub called The Miners, against which Venables had attained part of a million pound loan. When the young woman failed to find the place, he got quite shirty with her. Only after she had wandered round the Welsh capital for three days did he accept the almost unbelievable truth that this pub didn't exist at all.

The *Panorama* that went out on the 4 October 1993 and a similar programme transmitted days later on Channel 4, were not what the sports establishment and its journalistic arms wanted to hear. The FA regarded Sugar as a dangerous parvenu, importing unwelcome radical ideas into an industry run by chain-smokers in fur-collared coats. Venables, by contrast, was one of theirs. A source of good stories for favoured journalists, half-way through a big presenter's contract for the powerful BBC sport's department, and popular with the ordinary supporters, many in soccer wanted the story not to be true. So, when Venables contested the *Panorama* version, threatened legal action and complained that documents had been forged or stolen, there were many who were ready to believe him. In some newspapers a battle ensued between the Venables-supporting back pages – home of adventure and ro-

mance – and the money men and women on the City desks. Jeff Powell, influential soccer commentator of the *Daily Mail*, wrote of a "media witch-hunt ignited by his [Venables] bitter feud with Alan Sugar".

Gradually, as court actions loomed, the whole business lapsed into a "you pays your money and you takes your choice" period, where most people chose to believe whatever they liked best. As an executive in the BBC current affairs department at that time, I had seen the evidence, since any programme like this one was subjected to a battery of legal tests that made Volvo's safety procedures look dilatory. And I knew that they had Venables bang to rights.

With the passage of time, however, Venables began to emerge on top. Even those who thought that he had probably been a little naughty, decided – in the words of *Panorama* reporter Martin Bashir – that he was a "loveable rogue" in the English tradition of *Minder*. OK, so he was a bit fly with money, but he hadn't been found guilty of anything. And now England was calling. Venables, by contrast, was one of theirs. A man of charm and charisma was allowed to hold one of the big jobs in English national life because we simply didn't want to believe that he was bent. How politicians must long for a fraction of that latitude!

And now no one wanted to hear him criticised. This newspaper did comment on the risk that, as the FA is a limited company, if Venables were to be disqualified, he could not under the Insolvency Act remain as England manager. In other words, if *Panorama* were proved right, Venables would have to be fired under the most embarrassing circumstances. Kate Hoey, now in the House of Commons, warned against the appointment, and was vilified both in the newspapers and by party colleagues who were closer than she to the sports establishment. When *Panorama* put out a second programme in September 1994, some felt that it was being – as it had been during the Falklands war – vaguely treacherous. "Must you?" was the reaction of most BBC TV executives to the news that there would be another Venables show. Others spoke of a journalistic vendetta.

I don't expect any of those who criticised Hoey or *Panorama* to apologise. Many will have forgotten that they ever doubted the facts of the case. But the truth is that, for several years, a man of charm and charisma was allowed to hold one of the big jobs in English national life because we simply didn't want to believe that he was bent. How politicians must long for a fraction of that latitude!

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FIT THE BEST

Mr Hague, you could make Lords reform more radical



DONALD MACINTYRE
AFTER THE PEERAGE

Lloyd George cruelly called it "a body of 500 men chosen at random from among the ranks of the unemployed". But it has taken until now for his goal – of removing the hereditary peers from Parliament – to be in sight at last. A 1998-99 bill will remove the right of hereditary peers to vote. That much is relatively simple. Even among peers the Tories enjoy a majority over Labour (147 to 98), so some new Labour peers will be created to even the parties up. An unspecified number of hereditary

peers, chosen by their own party leaders, will also be turned into life peers: but now for the hard part. The Government will also announce its intention to proceed, eventually, to a more democratic second chamber. But of what kind?

No doubt it will change as the committee on Lords reform chaired by Lord Irvine – which held its first meeting last week – does its work. But a route map is now beginning to take shape. One influential view is that the second chamber should be two-thirds elected (probably by proportional representation on a regional list system) with the other third made up of distinguished cross-benchers, chosen by an independent appointments body. Members of the new second chamber might be elected for a fixed four-year term – like those for the Scottish parliament. (This is an admirable idea – only because it means that with different electoral cycles the second chamber might be controlled by a different majority from the first, thus sharpening its role as a check on the executive.) Learning from the lessons of the 1960s, the Government would not try to alter

the powers at the same time as the composition of the second chamber: instead, recognising that the more democratic legitimacy it has, the more it will clamour for extra powers, it would allow its remit to expand – within severe limits – incrementally, rather than the model of the European Parliament. But the detailed question of the form of an elected chamber would be left to a Royal Commission – an especially exalted and imposing one, to ensure that rejection of its findings would be highly embarrassing for whichever government was in power by the time it reported.

far so good. This is actually rather a brave scenario. But there are grave dangers at every step. Even removal of the hereditary element, the most deeply desired change in the Labour Party, will not be achieved without a ritual struggle by the forces of aristocratic reaction. There are already whispers that the peers' Tory majority could seek to cause trouble on other legislation in protest at the reform. (At present every defeat of the Government – like the one this week on the referendum on a London mayor – simply under-

lines the case for reform, which is why the Tory whips in the Lords have been energetically trying to keep them to a minimum.) But such guerrilla action cannot be sustained indefinitely. The much greater danger is that of inertia on the part of the governing party. That once having achieved a carefully balanced super-quango, a second-term Labour government finds it rather likes it. Its own MPs in the Commons, having gorged themselves on the bleeding corpse of a disenchanted aristocracy, then stop and think how appealing it would be to end their own careers as political appointees in a patronage-only Upper House. And what a threat to the Commons' own legitimacy it might be for there to be a democratically elected second chamber above it. Meanwhile the Government itself suddenly dreamt up all sorts of reasons why it should not create a bothersome revising chamber, subject to the whims of the electorate and emboldened by its own legitimacy to challenge the executive hard and often.

There are grounds, however, for cautious optimism that the dynamic for change will be such that this won't happen.

The Tory line, that they are not against reform but will oppose the bill removing the hereditary peerage's voting rights because it will produce an undemocratic abortion should be treated with suspicion. Their fears about the first stage are entirely legitimate. But if the current Tory regime was as progressive as some of their predecessors – such as Lord Carrington who actually made strenuous efforts to help Dick Crossman reform the Lords in the Sixties, or Alex Douglas Home who strongly advocated a mainly elected second chamber – they would now be outflanking Labour by publicly pushing proposals of their own for a democratised upper house. In

deed there is still time for them to do so. If they promised support for the broad strategy outlined above, they might even be able to negotiate a deal under which the reform could be achieved in a single stage. Their present strategy, however, is to call for a grand committee of both houses which (since it is sure to contain those in both the main parties who have a vested interest in delaying a democratised second chamber) is a sure recipe for sclerosis. The dangers of Roy-

Railtrack 'prepares to take £500m Channel link stake'

The go-ahead for construction of the £5.4bn Channel tunnel rail link was signalled yesterday as speculation continued to mount that Railtrack is preparing to take a stake of up to £500m in the project. Michael Harrison reports.

London & Continental Railways, the consortium chosen to build the 68-mile link and operate Eurostar services, announced an important breakthrough yesterday by naming contractors for the key tunnelling sections into St Pancras station.

Work on the tunnels, worth £200m, will start in April and removes any lingering doubts that the project would stop short of central London because of financing difficulties.

Adam Mills, LCR's chief executive, said the consortium was on course to raise up to £5.4bn in debt and equity in the middle of this year to cover total financing costs, including construction which is estimated at £3bn. The link is scheduled to open in 2003.

LCR also said that it was close to signing a deal to redevelop St Pancras Chambers, the listed Gothic-style building at the front of the planned Eurostar terminus, while the planning application to develop an intermediate station at Ebbesfleet in north Kent had been approved.

LCR plans to raise about £1bn through a share issue and a further £4.4bn in bank loans of which £1.4bn will be repaid from a government grant payable once the project is two-thirds complete.

However, LCR declined to quash speculation that Railtrack may emerge with a significant equity stake in the project. A spokesman said: "There are all sorts of options as to how Railtrack could be involved and putting in equity is one of them. However, discussions are still at a preliminary stage."

The other attraction of bringing Railtrack into the project is that it has a triple A debt rating, making it easier and cheaper for LCR to raise loans. Railtrack is one of six outside parties with which LCR is in discussions about helping to finance or construct the link.

There are eight members of the LCR consortium at present. The biggest are SBC Warburg Dillon Read and Bechtel, each with stakes of 18 per cent, followed by Virgin and National Express, each with 17 per cent.

LCR has come in for criticism from the City for the lack of detailed information about the project and delays in fund raising, leading to fears that it would turn into another Eurotunnel - vastly over budget and behind time. However, LCR has defended the delays, insisting that it will not go to the capital markets until it has a cast-iron investment case and is certain of its costings.

LCR also defended the performance of its Eurostar services to Paris and Brussels, saying that passenger levels had risen by more than 20 per cent to 6 million in 1997, giving it 60 per cent of the rail/air market between London and Paris.

Analysts estimate that Eurostar will have to increase passenger numbers to nearly 10 million before its starts to contribute profits. But Hamish Taylor, Eurostar's managing director, said that passenger yields had continued to improve last year, helped by a new ticketing and reservations system.

He added that bookings on Eurostar's new ski train service from Waterloo to the French Alps were "encouraging" while services to Brussels had been increased from eight to 10 trains a day following the opening of a high-speed line through Belgium which reduced journey times from three hours to two hours 40 minutes.

The construction contracts announced yesterday cover a quarter of the total tunnelling along the route. The preferred contractors are Tracklink, a joint venture between Mowlem, Holzmann and Besix, and a joint venture between Nuttall/Wayss and Freytag/Kier.

The biggest contract, worth £500m, for a tunnel taking the line to Stratford in East London is expected to be awarded shortly.

The development partner for St Pancras Chambers, formerly the old BR Midland hotel, will be announced in the next fortnight along with an outline of the proposed scheme. LCR launched a competition to develop the Grade One listed building in September, 1996.



The development partner for St Pancras Chambers (above) will be announced in the next fortnight. Photograph: David Rose

Laura Ashley puts factories up for sale as shares crash to all-time low

Shares in Laura Ashley crashed to an all-time low yesterday after the troubled retailer issued another profits warning and put five factories up for sale. Nigel Cope, City Correspondent, asks whether new chief executive David Hoare can turn the business around, or only clean it up for a quick sale.

Laura Ashley's fourth profits warning in less than a year was prompted by a dreadful performance in America, weak home furnishings sales and lower gross margins due to heavy discounting. Though management said its stock levels were now 25 per cent lower than last year there were reports that its shops were even allowing customers to haggle over prices in a desperate attempt to clear excess stock.

The business is now expected to record a pre-exceptional loss of £23m-26m in the year to January. Previous estimates by the company's broker had been for losses of £15m. The shares lost a further 25 per cent of their value, falling 8.5p to 26p.

However, David Hoare, who replaced Ann Iverson as chief executive before Christmas, insisted that Laura Ashley still has a future as an independent business. "Can it be turned around? I think it has every opportunity. This business has an independent future," he said.

The company has decided to pull out of manufacturing and put five factories up for sale in order to concentrate on its retailing operations. The decision will jeopardise 669 jobs. The sites under threat include four in Wales - two sewing factories in Oswestry and Gresford, the Texplan wallpaper and fabric printing operations in Newtown, a

made to measure plant in Carno - and a small site in Holland.

The move will end Laura Ashley's long-standing relationship with the Welsh valleys. However, the company said that it hoped to sell the factories as going concerns, safeguarding the workforce.

"It is a hard, tough decision. But initial reaction there is that this is the right thing to do," said Stephen Cox, the group's director of legal and commercial services. He said the decision would enable Laura Ashley to concentrate on brand management and retail.

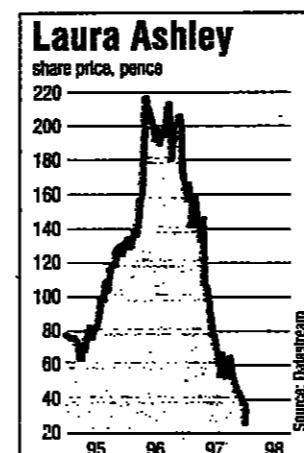
It is possible that the company will also pull out of North America after a disastrous expansion there by Ms Iverson. It was a disastrous performance there which was behind a 4 per cent fall in like-for-like sales across the group in the seven weeks to 10 January. US sales collapsed by 13 per cent. Trading in home

furnishings have been particularly weak with margins suffering from heavy discounting.

Michael Appel, a turnaround specialist, has been appointed as chief executive of the North American operations to implement a recovery programme.

There are fears that mounting losses and possible exceptional costs relating to the sale of the Welsh factories could mean that Laura Ashley may run into further cash flow problems. Though fresh £70m loan facilities were agreed with bankers before Christmas some analysts fear that on a month to month basis, the group will be in a precarious financial position.

Analysts speculated yesterday whether Sir Bernard Ashley, Laura Ashley's widower, who controls 35 per cent of the company may be tempted to take the company private. Another possibility is that Mr Hoare will sell the



group down and cut costs leaving the group a more likely candidate for a trade sale.

Some experts say the group could even pull out of retailing altogether and become a brand licensing company.

A Lloyds TSB spokesperson said: "Andrew Longhurst was group director of customer finance. That role no longer exists".

The colourful Mr Longhurst, regarded as one of the leading figures in the UK mortgage industry, was a casualty of Lloyds' decision to "focus on customer relations".

One analyst commented: "I was a bit stunned to see the golden-haired boy leaving. Whether he decided to leave or whether it was decided for him I just don't know."

"It seems strange that there is no longer room on the Lloyds board for the man synonymous with Cheltenham & Gloucester," added another source.

Mr Longhurst has been associated with C&G for more than 30 years. Lloyds was yesterday keen to dispel rumours that Mr Longhurst had been "edged out". "Mr Longhurst fully supports the reorganisation", said a spokesperson.

Some of Mr Longhurst's responsibilities, in particular on the mortgage side, will fall to Michael Fahey, 49, who was yesterday appointed deputy chief executive and tipped as an eventual successor to Peter Ellwood, the current chief executive.

Gordon Pell, currently director of distribution, will also take up some of Mr Longhurst's workload. Mr Pell is to join the board and take responsibility for a newly created UK retail banking division.

In a letter to potential applicants, Mr Davies wrote: "Needless to say, the packages we can offer are derisory by market standards, but the interest quotient of the jobs is very high!"

Until now, regulators have been paid comfortable six-figure salaries.

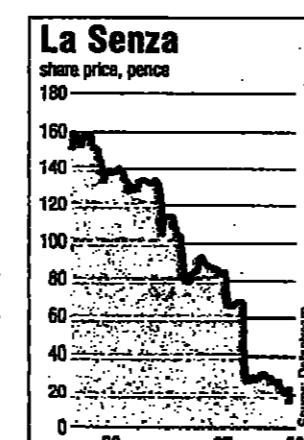
- Andrew Verity

City's super-regulator renews drive to fill senior vacancies

The Financial Services Authority, the city's new super-regulator, yesterday confirmed it had sent letters to leading figures in the financial sector in an urgent plea to fill four vacancies - but admitted the pay was "derisory".

The FSA has so far filled 13 out of 17-directors' posts with exactly the same people who used to run the nine old regulators which it is replacing. Last year, firms said they feared the new regulator would be out of touch with commercial realities.

Howard Davies, the chairman of the FSA, has now contacted dozens of leading figures in financial services in an attempt to persuade them to fill "important gaps in crucial posts, which we are now looking outside to fill." These include a director of investment business,



managers had performed poorly.

One City observer said: "The company and PR firm Biddick's tactic of sending pictures of scantily clad women around the City certainly ensured the flotation was popular... but the bottom really looks to have fallen out of their market."

La Senza has been rocked by the rise in property values and rents which has blown a huge hole in its expansion plans. Sales have proved disappointing and Mr Lewin admits that many of the group's

a director of finance and business planning, a director of consumer relations and a director of market exchanges.

But there is concern the regulator will have difficulty filling the posts with well-qualified people unless it can offer salaries approaching the generous rewards of the City. The FSA is still looking for candidates, despite appointing recruitment consultant Sexton Bainbridge and advertising in the press.

In a letter to potential applicants, Mr Davies wrote: "Needless to say, the packages we can offer are derisory by market standards, but the interest quotient of the jobs is very high!"

Until now, regulators have been paid comfortable six-figure salaries.

- Andrew Verity

GEC set to win £1bn tilting train order

GEC and Fiat look set to win the UK's largest train order yet, the £1bn contract to supply Virgin with high-speed tilting trains for the West Coast Mainline.

It emerged yesterday that one of three bidders, Siemens of Germany, had pulled out of the shortlist while Adtranz, the joint venture between ABB of Sweden and Daimler-Benz, was lagging behind GEC. Industry sources said GEC had been chosen for the final detailed discussions on the order.

The joint bid made by GEC and Fiat would guarantee jobs at GEC-Alstom's plants at Birmingham and Preston, which employ just under 2,000 people. About 70 per cent of the work would come to the UK, with bogies, tilting mechanisms and body shells sourced from Italy and the remainder of the work, including final assembly, carried out in Britain.

The 55 trains, each with seven carriages and capable of speeds of up to 160mph, would be based on Fiat's Italian Pendolino design. They would cut journey times to Birmingham to one hour, replacing some of the most outdated stock on the rail network. Virgin was yesterday heavily criticised for the reliability of its West Coast services.

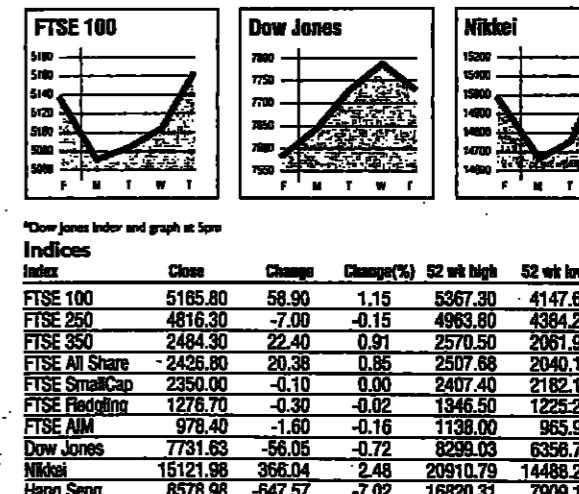
Siemens yesterday attacked Virgin, claiming the operator had insisted on draconian penalty clauses for late delivery amounting to some 30 per cent of the cost of the order. Jürgen Gehrels, Siemens UK chief executive, said Virgin had also insisted on unrealistic delivery times.

Separately yesterday it emerged that Siemens has won a contract worth up to £65m to supply a fleet of 16 electric trains to Regional Railways North East, the privatised train operator based in York. The 100mph trains, which will be leased through Angel, one of the three rolling-stock leasing groups, will replace a fleet of 20 trains dating from the 1960s.

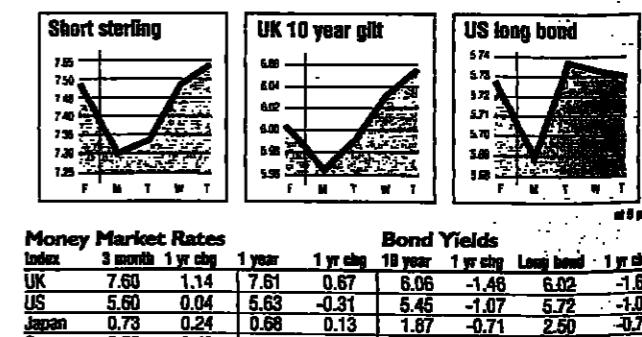
The new trains, which are similar to those built by Siemens for the Heathrow Express line, will be assembled in Spain, with parts supplied from Germany and some from Britain. The UK contribution includes communications and electronic systems for the carriages.

Chris Godsmark

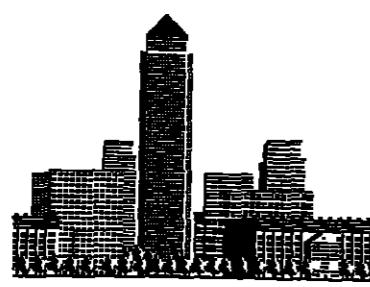
STOCK MARKETS



INTEREST RATES



GEC set to
win £1bn
tilting train
order



OUTLOOK ON POOR STANDARDS OF SERVICE FROM RAIL COMPANIES, REGULATING THE SUPERMARKETS, AND CITY APPOINTMENTS AT THE SFA

None of the privatised train companies criticised yesterday by the rail franchising director for declining standards of reliability and punctuality had the temerity to blame the wrong sort of snow. How could they when London is warmer than Cairo, migrating birds are returning to nest and the buds have been fooled into bursting open? Even so, the list of excuses on offer would have done a BR station announcer proud. Don't blame us, blame Railtrack, the train leasing companies, the rolling stock we inherited, the power supplies, landslides, crashes, tunnel collapses. Blame anybody, but not us Gov.

To be fair, the performance figures released by Ofpra are not quite the damning indictment opponents of rail privatisation would have us believe. Reliability and punctuality over the year improved on as many routes as it deteriorated and the abysmal performance on a number of services - notably Mr Branson's West Coast Mainline up to Scotland - skews the picture.

However, none of this disguises the fact that the trend is very definitely heading in the wrong direction. In the last three months of 1997 the number of cancelled and late-running trains was sharply up on a year ago. Given that the privatised rail industry costs the taxpayer almost twice as much in subsidies as the old state owned BR, this is quite an achievement.

Oddly enough, privatisation is very often followed by an initial period of declining performance. This was certainly the case with British Telecom and the water companies, all of which took some years to learn that the customer is there to be served, not

exploited. In theory this should not have happened with the rail industry since it was splintered into a hundred tiny bits on privatisation to instill financial tension and deliver greater competitive efficiency. Unfortunately, this does not appear to have done the trick. Nor do the commercial incentives built into the regulatory regime to encourage standards of service.

The main cause of the problem seems to be that rail privatisation was proceeded by an investment strike and a complete freeze on new rolling stock orders. Although that has now been remedied, passengers are paying the price while the train operators sit on their hands waiting for new rolling stock to arrive. This is not an acceptable state of affairs for an industry receiving £2bn of public subsidy. Yesterday's miserable figures give the Government all the ammunition it needs to act.

Supermarkets need an Oftrolley

Any casual observer of Somerfield's share price over the past month must be wondering what's going on. Once cruelly dubbed "the museum of UK food retailing" by one City analyst, Somerfield's share price has increased by 40 per cent in a matter of weeks. Given that poor old Kleinwort Benson could scarcely give the thing away when it floated 18 months ago, this is going some. The story is that a bid is just around the corner, but is this really credible?

Sainsbury's and Asda both claimed to be not much interested yesterday and if they are not going to bid, who on earth is? At this stage the best explanation of Somerfield's soaring share price is that it's just another New Year ramp. All the same, there is little doubt that the big players of this industry are itching for consolidation to take place. If they could take each other over, they would.

While the Big Four make great play of their ability to grow organically, the truth is that in a low inflation environment and with planning restrictions hampering their ability to open superstores, anything other than a small's pace, they are going to find it virtually impossible to maintain growth rates out of internal development alone.

While the major supermarkets might feel they need consolidation, the rest of us need it like a hole in the head. According to new figures by Verdict, the top dozen food retailers now account for 70 per cent of the UK's £93bn grocery market. The "Big Four" - Tesco, Sainsbury's, Asda and Safeway - make up almost half of it.

For such a huge market, this would already seem to be excessive. Any further increase in the market power of the big four would certainly reduce consumer choice and lead to higher prices. While a combination of say Asda and Somerfield would establish a player not as big as the two market leaders, it could still be expected to establish a number of local monopolies. The existence of another dominant player in the market would also put further unacceptable pressure on suppliers and smaller food retailers.

The power of the supermarkets is already such that policy consideration might perhaps seriously be given to regulating them rather in the same way as the utilities. The suggestion of an Oftrolley is daft as it might seem. Certainly if supermarkets are allowed further to consolidate, some method of ensuring that the benefits are shared between customers and shareholders would have to be found.

Let's start with a pricing formula

of say RPI minus 10. That ought to stop them in their tracks.

Roll up for derisory pay

"Long hours, derisory pay, but high interest quotient". Here's a job offer most City folk won't find hard to resist. So desperate has Howard Davies, chairman of the Financial Services Authority, become in his search for suitably qualified practitioners to fill key positions at the new City regulator, that he's written directly to firms appealing to men of decency and honour to step forward and do their duty.

Unfortunately, these are not the sort of jobs most people would want to take a pay cut to fill. Mr Davies has already attracted some big names from the capital markets and financial services industry to the main board of the FSA, but those positions are part time, non executive and prestigious - a good thing to have on the old CV. The ones he's now trying to fill are a couple of levels down, the anonymous hard grafters, not quite the foot soldiers but not much

above senior officer rank either.

Regulators have always found it hard to attract employees from the other side of the fence, though there are notable exceptions. Andrew Winckler, chief executive of the SFA's forerunner, the SIB, is one, as is his head of the markets and exchanges group, David Pritchard. Both of them came from the City. But on the whole it's a one street with the signs pointing very clearly towards the glistening streets of the City. The Bank of England's supervision department has been a constant and happy hunting ground for the City's much more highly paid risk management positions.

The FSA obviously needs experienced practitioners if it is adequately to understand the often highly complex nature of the markets and businesses it has to regulate. Moreover, it is plainly in the City's interests that these positions be filled by people who understand what the City's about. There is little that could be more dangerous to the City's continuing prosperity than ignorant, hostile and overly onerous regulation.

The obvious solution is that of secondment. Plainly there are drawbacks to this approach. The risk of regulatory capture, where the regulator becomes tamed by the industry, is higher if the regulator is staffed by industry placement on two year secondments than if poached by those prepared to cross the fence permanently. All the same, the secondment system is said to work well for the Securities and Exchange Commission in the US. There a stint at the SEC is regarded as an essential stamp on your passport to the top. The FSA needs to aspire to similar status.

HK investors take fright as debt rumours hit market

Fears that a big property group might default on its debts triggered a 647-point fall in Hong Kong share prices yesterday, reports Stephen Vines. Meanwhile, the International Monetary Fund appears to have forced the Indonesian government into finally accepting the terms of its \$43bn rescue package.

Rumour proved to be the most powerful force in the Hong Kong stock market yesterday as investors took fright from reports that the Sino Group, a major property developer controlled by the Ng family, would be forced to default on short term debts. The Hang Seng fell 7 per cent.

The rumours sent the shares of Sino Hotels down 51 per cent with Sino Land plunging 45 per cent and its associated company, TST Properties, falling 34 per cent. Fears of default also helped fuel significant declines in the shares of HSBC Holdings, one of the two large Hong Kong banks who are lenders to the Sino Group.

"The directors wish to state categorically that there is absolutely no ground to such a rumour," the Sino Group is able to pay its loans as they become due and has sufficient working capital," the company said.

Those with long memories in the Hong Kong market recalled that the Ng family almost caused the collapse of the entire Hong Kong stock market in the wake of the 1987 crash when they were left holding massive uncovered futures po-



A Hong Kong Stock Exchange floor trader working on a printer during morning trading yesterday. The Hang Seng Index closing the morning session at the session low of 8,608.87, down 6.69 per cent, following a slide by the Sino group of companies. Photographic Reuter

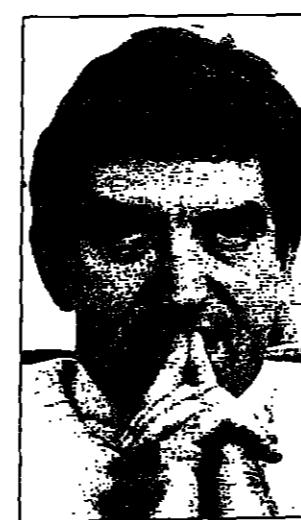
sitions which they were prepared to default on but were persuaded to settle in part following a government bail-out.

Ten years on, the Sino Group has bounced back and has gained a reputation as one of the most aggressive major-league property developers. It also has a reputation for high gearing. However, few analysts believe that the company would go so far as to default on its loans. Nikko Securities, in a commentary, described the situation at Sino as "tight" but be-

lieved that the company would deal with it by lowering prices for pre-sales of new projects.

Meanwhile in Indonesia, which has been casting a spell of gloom over the following last week's *Alice in Wonderland* budget, the government has been forced to concede to the conditions laid down by the IMF. However, vital controls on rice and fuel prices escaped the net because of real fears that this could provoke social unrest.

The initial response of investors was less than encouraging. The local currency lost another 12 per cent of its value and share prices dropped 4 per cent.



Niall FitzGerald: Pledged to maintain investment

Unilever boss keeps faith in the tiger economies

Niall FitzGerald, chairman of the consumer products giant Unilever, today launched a passionate defence of the embattled economies of South-East Asia, pledging to maintain its own investment and urging Western companies not to write off the region.

In a speech this morning to business leaders in the Philippines, Mr FitzGerald said commentaries in the West were skating over the fundamental strengths of the Asian market, with its youthful, growing, enterprising and educated population.

Unilever generates 14 per cent of its sales and profits in the region and has operations in all but four South-East Asian economies. It recently opened

an icecream plant in Vietnam, a margarine factory in Jakarta and a regional headquarters in Singapore.

Speaking at the European Chamber of Commerce in Manila, Mr FitzGerald said

pundits were now rushing to tell everyone the success of the tiger economies had proved a "sand castle in the air" but Unilever's own strong growth justified its long-term faith in the region.

Mr FitzGerald painted a picture at odds with the image of cronyism, corruption, inefficiency and speculative borrowing that has come to characterise the region since the crisis began to unfold last year.

"Asia as a market is driven

by increasingly demanding and sophisticated consumers. We

are not talking about short-term froth. We are talking about changing patterns of consumption reflecting a growing and youthful population, higher standards of education, and a population shift from agriculture to manufacturing and service industries.

"All this is underpinned by a solid foundation of human capital: clever, enterprising citizens; dedicated and adaptable workforces and a keen sense of teamwork, discipline, and interdependence which, along with a good savings ratio, keeps the welfare burden down to manageable proportions and keep national tax rates down to levels which stimulate enterprise and initiative."

If the company lost its nerve every

time a country suffered a setback, there would not be an entity today called Unilever with \$50bn of sales, he said.

Michael Harrison

Siemens chief warns UK will lose business without the euro

British companies will lose business if they refuse to do deals using the euro currency, regardless of whether the UK signs up to European monetary union (EMU), Siemens, the German electronics and engineering giant, warned yesterday.

Bernard Euler, the finance director of Siemens UK business, said suppliers prepared to offer quotes in Euros would gain a competitive advantage over rivals which quoted prices in sterling. "Whether the UK is in the European Monetary Union or not, if UK companies are not prepared to quote in euros

they will lose out long-term, if their competitors are prepared to quote in euros," he said.

Siemens is embarking on seminars for some of its 12,000 UK suppliers to explain the change in policy and said that none had so far said they would refuse to quote prices in euros.

Mr Euler made clear that all companies would be expected to pass on any cost savings from a single currency through to lower prices.

He said customers would

"demand these savings to be reflected in prices, whether or not the suppliers in question are capable of achieving these cost savings. They just have to squeeze their other costs harder in order to bridge the gap."

The warnings came as Siemens revealed a 35 per cent surge in sales from its UK operations to £1.02bn last year, the first time its turnover had topped the £2bn mark. Employee numbers also surged by almost a quarter, to 13,600, though exports fell by 20 per cent, to £61m.

Meanwhile, FI Group, the computer outsourcing special-

istis, warned yesterday moves by Britain to join EMU could be scuppered by companies' lack of preparation for the switch. Hilary Cropper, chief executive of FI Group, said most British companies have only just started to think about the problem. "If Britain decided to join EMU in the first wave there would be no way any company could do it," she said. Ms Cropper said that companies dealing with the public, such as utilities, retailers and financial services groups, still have a lot of work to do to get ready.

- Chris Godsmark
and Peter Thal Lorsen

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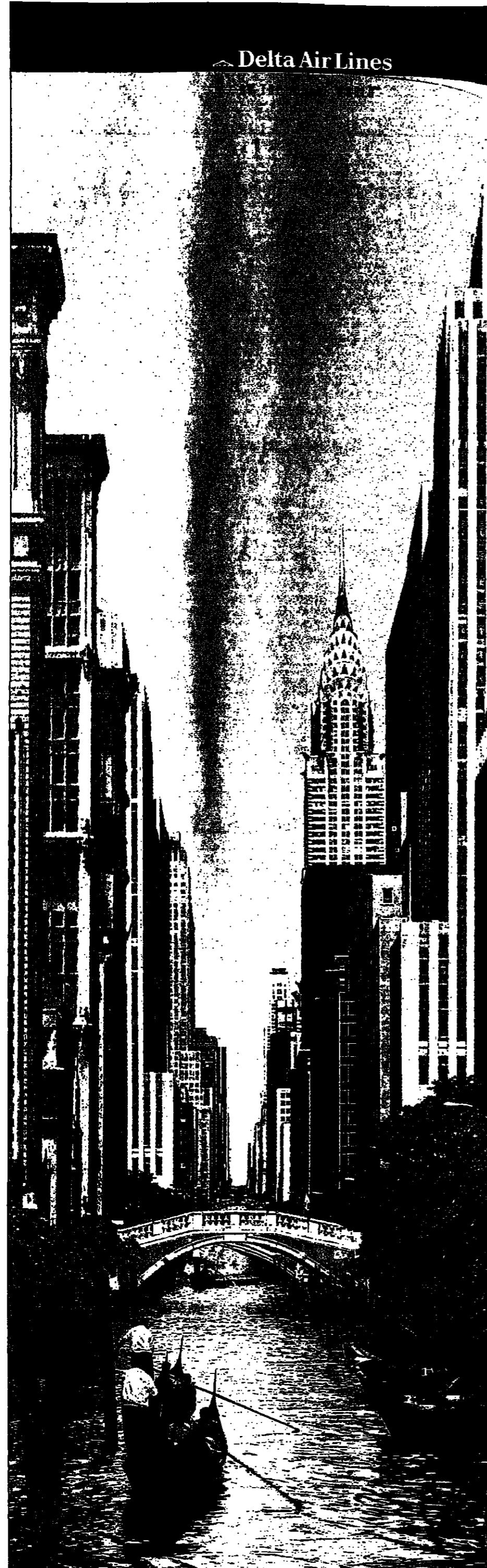
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THE INVESTMENT COLUMN

EDITED BY ANDREW YATES

FI paints bullish growth picture

Everyone knows the information technology (IT) industry is booming. The reasons are familiar: pressure on companies to improve their efficiency by automating, the need to prepare IT systems for monetary union, not to mention the dreaded millennium bug. But any boom brings the risk of a bust. The first worry is of staff shortages, which could force IT groups to postpone contracts, thereby hampering their rate of growth. The second is that, having successfully squashed the millennium bug, the rush of work will dry up and the IT industry will go into a slump.

When a company has just reported a 54 per cent increase in first-half profits to £4.31m, as FI Group just has, raising these fears may seem overly gloomy. But Hilary Cropper, chief executive of the applications management specialist, has a convincing response to both. She points out that fixing computers' inability to recognise the year 2000 as a valid date currently accounts for just 12 per cent of the group's sales. What's more, the rush to fix the problem has prompted firms to put other, less pressing, IT projects on hold until the next decade. By then, the UK's likely entry into monetary union will have thrown up a whole load of new gremlins for FI to tackle.

FI's real secret weapon, however, is IIS Infotech, the Indian computer services company it bought for £25m last month. By farming out work to India, the group will be able to tap into a labour market which produces more software graduates than the US each year, all willing to be employed at a fraction of the cost of a British programmer. That allows FI to move beyond serving its traditional areas of finance, retailing and the service sector. The group thinks it can start undercutting its competitors and pinch contracts in the manufacturing and consumer goods industries, as well as the City.

All this adds up to a very bullish growth picture. That said, the shares reflect this. Brokers reckon full-year profits will be £9.5m, rising to about £13m the following year. That prices the shares, which edged up 5p to 1002.5p yesterday, at a staggering 38 times April 1999 earnings. FI is an impressive business with better

FI Group: At a glance

Market value: £322m, share price 1002.5p (+5p)

Year to 30 April Half-year to 30 October

Five-year record	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999
Turnover (£m)	61.7	78.8	98.8	46.3	71.2
Pre-tax profits (£m)	3.26	4.31	5.00	1.00	2.50
Earnings per share (p)	8.4	8.2	14.8	6.2	9.9
Dividends per share (p)	-	-	-	-	-
Business mix - industry					
Service 35%					
Retail 25%					
Finance 40%					
Source: R					

prospects than most of its peers. But for the time being it's hard to see the shares rising much further from these heady levels.

House of Fraser recovery in train

After years of what seemed like unending misery House of Fraser finally shows the green shoots of recovery in 1997. Its new own label ranges are taking off, some of its worst department stores have been revamped or earmarked for sale, stock problems have largely been eradicated and margins are on the rise. The City has embraced the good news and the share price which has had a great run.

But just as everything seemed to be going right HoF has come out with disappointing trading figures in the run up to Christmas and the shares fell more than 7 per cent to 203.5p. So is this a blip or is a warning sign that the

HoF is back to its old tricks again?

Sales growth has slowed. Part of the reason is that HoF suffered from the downturn in the retail market in the Autumn and shoppers determination to leave Christmas presents to the last moment. The rest of the slowdown stems from the management's drive for margins, mainly through pushing their own fashion brands rather than relying on creaming off some of the takings from in-store concessions. Gross margins grew about one percentage point to 33 per cent, but this too disappointed some analysts who were hoping for faster progress.

The underlying message is that, along with the retail market as a whole, HoF's Christmas was nothing to write home about but was hardly a disaster. The share price fall looks harsh but the shares had flown too high too early on unrealistic expectations of the speed of HoF's reforms.

Société Générale forecasts have left profit forecasts for the year to the end of January at £28.5m, but has downgraded profits for the following year

from £37m to £35m putting the shares on a prospective p/e ratio of 27.5x to 19. HoF is moving in the right direction but on this sort of valuation the shares are no bargain.

Portmeirion's small servings

Portmeirion Pottery, the tip-market table and ovenware business, yesterday served up another set of disappointing figures. Neither summer windfalls nor winter sales seem to have brought any joy to the group and it was forced to issue its second profit warning in the last six months. This caused the shares to crash another 52.5% to 240p yesterday, chipping another £5m off its market capitalisation. It is now valued at just under £25m, less than half its worth last summer.

In August the company, which is still controlled by the family of architect Clough Williams-Ellis, reported a 9 per cent increase in first half profits to £2.7m but warned that difficult trading conditions meant full year profits would be flat.

The shares have been sliding downwards ever since and yesterday the company added to investors' woes by warning that earnings would now fall £1m short of last year.

A special anniversary promotion rescued first-half profits in the US market, which accounts for over 40 per cent of turnover. However, sales have fallen away in the last few months while the continued strength of sterling has depressed exports to Europe.

The home market also remains sluggish. Portmeirion does not seem to have attracted any of the windfall spending which has helped keep demand for other consumer goods buoyant, and the company remains exposed to the price discounting which consumers increasingly demand.

Analysts are also concerned by the lack of new products in the pipeline and have again downgraded profits forecasts. They are now looking at £5.4m for 1997 and £5.65m in 1998. The shares now look very cheap at under seven times this year's prospective earnings but investors would be wise to wait for any signs of a sustained recovery before buying.

Two charged over alleged \$2bn City gold fraud

Two men have been charged and two released on bail after allegedly attempting to trade forged gold certificates worth \$2bn (£1.2bn) at a London branch of NatWest. The four men were arrested at the NatWest branch on Wednesday evening following a covert operation by the City of London Police Fraud Squad. Detective Inspector Ken Stewart, an officer on the case, said: "The excellent assistance we received from the bank in this case shows that by joint co-operation we can effectively combat this type of fraud."

Budget set for 17 March

Chancellor Gordon Brown will deliver his second Budget statement to the Commons on Tuesday 17 March, the Government announced yesterday. The day was named by Leader of the House, Ann Taylor, in exchanges on coming parliamentary business. It marks a return to spring Budgets from the combined tax and spending package in the autumn under the previous Tory government.

Early Freemans demerger

Sears, the troubled retailer, has accelerated the planned demerger of Freemans, its mail order business, to the autumn of this year. In a trading statement, the group said trading at Freemans was strong, with underlying sales rising by 6 per cent so far in the second half. In the 23 weeks to 10 January same store sales for the whole group, excluding the footwear businesses, were up 2.6 per cent.

Amey secures contract

Amey, the construction company, said yesterday that a joint venture of its rail track laying arm had won a £130m contract from Railtrack. Amey's subsidiary Amey Railways, in joint venture with SECO/DGC of France, will renew railway tracks in Railtrack's Great Western region and will involve 3,000 miles of track.

Cognizant's second break-up

Cognizant, the \$7.5bn group spun out of Dun & Bradstreet 14 months ago, yesterday announced plans to split into two groups in what could be the first demerger of a company that has already demerged. It will be divided into IMS Health, which provides information solutions to the pharmaceutical industries and which has 600 staff in the UK, and Nielsen Media Research, which provides electronic audience measurement.



Janis Kong, Gatwick's managing director, celebrating a record-breaking year for the BAA

BAA rail-link plans lift off after Heathrow fire setback

Last month's fire at Heathrow's Terminal One lost BAA 50,000 passengers, the airports operator, said yesterday.

But on a brighter note, the company unveiled plans to launch a forerunner to its £440m Heathrow Express rail link later this month. Michael Harrison reports.

The Heathrow fire, which started in the ducting of a Burger King bar in Terminal One, left a large dent in BAA's passenger figures for December. The group's seven airports handled a record total of 103.3 million passengers for the year - an in-

crease of 6.7 per cent on 1996. But the growth in passenger numbers for December was only half that at 3.4 per cent.

Another factor affecting passenger growth last month was the blaze inside the Channel tunnel a year earlier which had resulted in an extra 100,000 passengers in December, 1996. BAA also experienced a sharp decline in travel by East Asian passengers because of the economic crisis in the Far East. This resulted in a loss of about 75,000 passengers.

The biggest traffic growth over the year was at Stansted where passenger numbers rose 11.5 per cent to 5.37 million, closely followed by Gatwick where traffic levels rose 11.2 per cent to 26.8 million.

The Heathrow Express is not due to open until June. It will cut the journey time from the airport into Paddington station to 15 minutes.

However, BAA is launching what it calls a Fast Train service from 19 January which will take 30 minutes. Passengers will travel on new trains from Paddington to a dedicated station near Heathrow where passengers will complete the journey by coach. For the first week, travel will be free. After that a one-way fare will cost £5.

The full Heathrow Express service will operate four times an hour and is part of BAA's strategy to increase the number of passengers travelling by public transport to 50 per cent.

BA to take equity stake in Polish airline

British Airways is planning to take an equity stake in LOT, the Polish airline with which it forged a strategic alliance yesterday, its first with a carrier from a former eastern bloc country. LOT is due to be privatised as part of the Polish government's liberalisation programme and Charles Gurassa, director of passenger business at BA, said it would consider buying shares at that stage.

The alliance with LOT will involve a code-sharing agreement on flights on the Manchester-Warsaw and Gatwick-Krakow routes, reciprocal participation in frequent-fliers programmes and co-operation between the Polish airline and BA's German subsidiary Deutsche BA. The deal means that BA now has strategic alliances with three European airlines - the other two are Iberia and Finnair. But Mr Gurassa said it was keen to build further partnerships. There are at least twelve European carriers yet to sign up to one of the global alliances such as Star, which are coming to dominate the aviation market. They include Aer Lingus, Portugal, Maersk in Denmark, Meridiana of Italy, Olympic of Greece, Eral and the Russian airline Aeroflot.

- Michael Harrison

COMPANY RESULTS

	Turnover £	Pre-tax £	EPS	Dividend
Sidney C Banks (I)	178.1m (162.5m)	2.16m (2.18m)	15.1p (16.7p)	4.25p (4.25p)
Epic Multimedia (I)	1.8m (2.2m)	0.103m (-0.921m)	0.44p (3.95p)	n/a
Forepeak (I)	32.16m (30.74m)	1.88m (1.01m)	2.74p (1.38p)	1.55p (1.375p)
FI Group (I)	71.2m (48.3m)	4.31m (2.81m)	9.4p (6.2p)	2.8p (1.7p)
Greenwich Resources (P) (-)	-0.226m (1.95m)	0.004p (1.5p)	n/a	
Gresham Computing (P) 8.62m (9.27m)	0.667m (1.68m)	1.17p (2.15p)	0.5p (0.5p)	
(I) - Red (I) - Marin				

Brussels hurdles may force BIB to rethink strategy

Shareholders in British Interactive Broadcasting (BIB), the digital interactive television service backed by British Telecommunications and British Sky Broadcasting, could be forced to rethink the venture following new competition hurdles raised by the European Commission, it emerged yesterday. Chris Godsmark, Business Correspondent, reports on the latest blow to BIB's ambitions.

EC sources said yesterday that the plans by BIB for a digital satellite service including home banking, shopping and education channels, could damage competition in the rest of the digital TV market. BT and BSkyB both have 32.5 per cent stakes in the venture, with the remainder held by Midland Bank and Matsushita of Japan, which owns the Panasonic consumer brand.

The EC, which has been investigating BIB since June, is understood to want to force BIB to offer its technology to rival cable and digital terrestrial groups. The venture would invest some £250m to subsidise the cost of the digital set-top boxes, which enable homes to access the channels. The boxes are planned to sell for around £200, compared to the manufacturing cost of some £500.

It would mean reducing the number of services to homes, a move which has been prohibited on competition grounds. BIB has to offer the platform to as many service providers, such as banks or computer game businesses, as want to use the technology.

Asked what he would do with the money, Mr Fayed said yesterday: "It has already gone on players. We have spent more than £6m but Mr Fayed has still made more money available. It may sound silly to some people to talk of Premiership football at Fulham, which is a small club. But

Kevin Keegan's and Mohamed Al Fayed's ambitions to bring the glory days back to Fulham, the Second Division London football club, received a boost yesterday when they announced a £1.5m shirt sponsorship deal with Demon Internet, one of Europe's biggest internet companies.

Mr Keegan's plans include rebuilding Fulham's ground, Craven Cottage, to its capacity from 18,000 to 26,000 and introducing new conferencing facilities. In return for the money, Demon will get their name



Kevin Keegan (left) and Ray Wilkins at the launch yesterday of Demon Internet's £1.5m sponsorship deal with Fulham FC

Photograph: Kalpesh Lathigra

Fulham unveil Demon Internet sponsorship

we are very confident and have a five-year plan to get there."

Mr Fayed, the controversial chief of Harrods, paid £30m for Fulham last summer and soon signed former England star striker Keegan, who will run the club on a day-to-day basis, and ex-England midfielder Ray Wilkins, whose job is to oversee matters on the pitch.

Mr Keegan's plans include rebuilding Fulham's ground, Craven Cottage, to its capacity from 18,000 to 26,000 and introducing new conferencing facilities. In return for the money, Demon will get their name

emblazoned of Fulham's shirts and merchandise, free use of a 10-seat executive box and free tickets for each home game.

David Furness, sales and marketing director of Demon, said: "This is a large deal compared to many Premier League Clubs let alone Football League clubs. This club is definitely going somewhere."

Analysts have been concerned that Demon desperately needs a cash injection to expand its business. However, Mr Furness denied that Demon needed any extra money to survive.

— Andrew Yates

BT trials to allow competitors into local telephone market

British Telecom is to press ahead this month with trials of a service that will allow its competitors to use the group's local network without customers having to receive a BT bill.

The move, supported by Ofcom, the telecoms watchdog, would see BT relinquish the use of its brand name for local customers who take up the service, known as "Calls and Access".

Yesterday BT revealed the two companies which will take part in a technical trials of the package, which will run for three months.

They are Long Distance International (LDI), a US-owned phone business which buys bulk capacity from big operators and sells it at cheap rates to consumers, and UniqueAir, a mobile business.

Homes which take up the offer will

receive a bill from LDI or UniqueAir, despite being on the BT network. LDI has grown rapidly since its UK launch 18 months ago, by offering calls to the US for just 7 pence per minute. BT hopes the service could bring new business from potential telecoms operators such as banks or retailers.

However, doubts remain about the prices BT is charging for the service,

which apparently give rival firms little room to make profits on top. Bill Noseworthy, LDI's managing director, said Ofcom was investigating whether BT was intending to use the service to subsidise the rest of its network. He said: "Instead of the local network being a BT birthright it's an industry heritage, because the taxpayer has after all paid for it."

— Chris Godsmark

Interest Rates

Bond Yields

Country	3 mth	chg	1 yr	chg	2 yr	chg	5 yr	chg	10 yr	chg
Australia	4.92	-0.01	4.71	-0.04	4.96	-0.04	5.42	-0.05	5.71	-0.07
Belgium	4.34	-0.01	4.13	-0.01	4.32	-0.01	4.57	-0.01	5.05	-0.01
Canada	4.32	-0.01	4.11	-0.01	4.31	-0.01	4.56	-0.01	5.03	-0.01
Denmark	4.22	-0.01	4.01	-0.01	4.21	-0.01	4.46	-0.01	4.93	-0.02
Finland	4.22	-0.01	4.01	-0.01	4.21	-0.01	4.46	-0.01	4.93	-0.02
Iceland	4.22	-0.01	4.01	-0.01	4.21	-0.01	4.46	-0.01	4.93	-0.02
Ireland	4.22	-0.01	4.01	-0.01	4.21	-0.01	4.46	-0.01	4.93	-0.02
Italy	4.22	-0.01	4.01	-0.01	4.21	-0.01	4.46	-0.01	4.93	-0.02
Japan	4.22	-0.01	4.01	-0.01	4.21	-0.01	4.46	-0.01	4.93	-0.02
Malta	4.22	-0.01	4.01	-0.01	4.21	-0.01	4.46	-0.01	4.93	-0.02
Netherlands	4.22	-0.01	4.01	-0.01	4.21	-0.01	4.46	-0.01	4.93	-0.02
New Zealand	4.22	-0.01	4.01	-0.01	4.21	-0.01	4.46	-0.01	4.93	-0.02
Norway	4.22	-0.01	4.01	-0.01	4.21	-0.01	4.46	-0.01	4.93	-0.02
Portugal	4.22	-0.01	4.01	-0.01	4.21	-0.01	4.46	-0.01	4.93	-0.02
Saudi Arabia	4.22	-0.01	4.01	-0.01	4.21	-0.01	4.46	-0.01	4.93	-0.02
Singapore	4.22	-0.01	4.01	-0.01	4.21	-0.01	4.46	-0.01	4.93	-0.02
South Africa	4.22	-0.01	4.01	-0.01	4.21	-0.01	4.46	-0.01	4.93	-0.02
Spain	4.22	-0.01	4.01	-0.01	4.21	-0.01	4.46	-0.01	4.93	-0.02
Sweden	4.22	-0.01	4.01	-0.01	4.21	-0.01	4.46	-0.01	4.93	-0.02
UK	4.22	-0.01	4.01	-0.01	4.21	-0.01	4.46	-0.01	4.93	-0.02
USA	4.22	-0.01	4.01	-0.01	4.21	-0.01	4.46	-0.01	4.93	-0.02

Interest Rates

Contract	Settlement	High	Low	Est. floor volume	Open interest
Long Gil	Mar-98	123.44	123.31	7378	15549
Dollar	Spot	106.72	106.25	23473	28197
UK Base	7.25%	250	245		
Germany	Discount	250	245		
Lombard	450%	500	450		
France	Intervention	330%	325		
Canada	Discount	550%	540		
Italy	Prime	600%	590		
Spain	Discount	450%	440		
Switzerland	10% Repo	475%	465		
Denmark	Discount	350%	340		
Sweden	Discount	100%	95		
Spa/Advance	3.30% Discount	350%	340		
Alpo/Repo(A)	435%	425			
Lombard	33%	325			

Source: Bloomberg

Money Market Rates

Contract	Base date	Last	Chg	% chg	31 Dec	YTD chg
Treasury Bills	7/5/98	75	700	722	659	
LIBOR	7/5/98	739	731	731	731	
Domestic Deposits	7/5/98	725	725	725	725	
Europen Deposits	7/5/98	725	725	725	725	
Eligible Bank Bills	7/5/98	725	725	725	725	
Eligible CDs	7/5/98	725	725	725	725	
European CDs	7/5/98	725	725	725	725	
ECU Deposits	7/5/98	725	725	725	725	

Source: Bloomberg

Commodity Indexes

Base date	Last	Chg	% chg	31 Dec	YTD chg
Brent Crude (\$/barrel)	85.00	0.00	0.0%	85.00	0.0%
WTI Crude (\$/barrel)	85.00	0.00	0.0%	85.00	0.0%
Gasoline (\$/barrel)	18.00	0.00	0.0%	18.00	0.0%
Heating Oil (\$/barrel)	18.00	0.00	0.0%	18.00	0.0%
Jet Fuel (\$/barrel)	18.00	0.00	0.0%	18.00	0.0%
Gasoline 95 (\$/barrel)	18.00	0.00	0.0%	18.00	0.0%
Gasoline 91 (\$/barrel)	18.00	0.00	0.0%	18.00	0.0%
Gasoline 87 (\$/barrel)	18.00	0.00	0.0%	18.00	0.0%
Gasoline 83 (\$/barrel)	18.00	0.00	0.0%	18.00	0.0%
Gasoline 79 (\$/barrel)	18.00	0.00	0.0%	18.00	0.0%
Gasoline 75 (\$/barrel)	18.00	0.00	0.0%	18.00	0.0%
Gasoline 71 (\$/barrel)</td					

27/RACING

Yet another large step for Mann

When he was forced to give up riding for training, Charlie Mann had little more than a reputation as a fast liver and a fast talker. His remarkable results have proved the doubters wrong and, as Richard Edmondson hears, he could be poised to record his biggest success yet at Ascot tomorrow.

If he wins the Victor Chandler Chase at Ascot tomorrow, Celiwell will become Mann's best friend. Charlie Mann has been many things in his life – bon viveur, pony jockey and submarine salesman – but now the vision is set solely on becoming a successful trainer. And when it comes to hoardings there is nothing better than a big-race televised winner on a Saturday.

Charlie James Mann, you may remember, was the rider

who damaged his neck so badly that he was banned by the Jockey Club doctor from riding in Britain. He was told it would be madness to continue.

Charlie, though, preferred a second opinion, his own, and, most notably, went on to ride his A Slip to victory in the grueling Seville Pardubicka in 1995 on an international licence. It was like walking to the North Pole to prove you didn't have a sniffle.

Mann rode 84 winners in Britain, but has established himself more readily as a businessman of the bizarre. Apart from selling a submarine from Hull's docks, he has dealt in caviar and American grain. He doesn't mind letting you know he has been a bit of a wheeler-dealer in his time.

"I like to think I'm pretty streetwise and to survive as a trainer you've got to be like that," he said yesterday. "From riding to training takes a bit of doing, and being streetwise doesn't hurt you. If you need to make a few quid every day you

get out of bed a bit earlier than most."

This is a milestone year for Mann. At the end of February, he moves from Kings Farm Stables to Whiccombe Park, which may only be a mile away

RICHARD EDMONDSON
NAP: Pine Ridge Lad
(Southwell 3.30)
NB: Sail By The Stars
(Kempton 3.10)

on the Ordnance Survey map of Upper Lambourn but is light years removed in terms of facilities. "We've got horses all

over the shop at the moment," he said. "We've got only 18 boxes in our main yard and we've got 36 horses in, eight at various studs and about 50 on the books with no room to put them all."

"At the new place we'll have an absolutely top-class establishment, including facilities we haven't got right now, 54 boxes, horsewalkers, jumping rings and 20 acres of land. It's amazing to think that when we started less than five years ago I had just two horses and a £28,000 overdraft."

Mann will be 40 on the eve

of the Grand National, and, this summer, he marries one of his owners, Susannah Barrasough, whom he will not exactly be rescuing penniless from a woman's refuge. "She's got a lot more money than I have," he observed.

Charlie is not really destitute himself and has managed to assemble some wealthy owners at his court. The unkind say this is because he is very good at speaking the stuff you find in farmers' fields, but there are also figures to back up his training skills. Mann has increased his total for the four years he has held a licence and is on course to continue the pattern. "I've attracted the owners through good looks and charm I hope," he said. "But, really, it's results basically, and if you get winners you get owners."

A winner at Ascot tomorrow would post an emphatic advertisement, and to hear Mann talk you realise that he has already set aside several hours on Sunday morning to take phone calls. "He [Celewell] won round

visit to Ascot, was backed in to 7-1 from 10-1, with William Hill. Or Royal, in contrast, was eased to 5-1 from 9-2, while Mulligan moved in the same direction to 6-1 from 11-2.

Green Green Desert, the chief beneficiary from the rising of the weights, is 25-1 from 33-1 with the same firm.

The gelding, who was pulled up behind Or Royal on his last

visit to Ascot, was backed in to 7-1 from 10-1, with William Hill.

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Morgan needs storming display to blow away grief's dark clouds

The death of his parents has had a profound effect on Darren Morgan's snooker career. Instead of a stacking his mantlepiece full of trophies, potentially the best player to come out of Wales now struggles to find the motivation to lift a cue. Tomorrow he plays in the Welsh Open in Newport knowing that his future is on the line. Guy Hodgson reports

As Darren Morgan left the Crucible last April he could see an end to his problems. The cloud that had descended on the death of his mother was lifting and he had clung on to a cherished spot in snooker's top 16.

On the way back to his home in south Wales his father said: "Your mother's gone, that's it, you can't do anything about it, you must look to the future. Next season, for the first time in eight or nine years you've got no problems, you're going to fly. You'll probably win two or three tournaments."

Two days later his father, Morgan Morgan, died.

Only Morgan, 31, can truly quantify his loss, but the rankings can provide a clue. Three years ago he was firmly established in the world's top eight, now he is provisionally ranked 19th. He finds snooker difficult, preferring to go fishing instead. It is not too much of an exaggeration to say that when he plays in the Regal Welsh Open in Newport tomorrow his future will be on the line as well as a match.

If he holds on to his top 16 place this season, he says, it "will be like Christmas". He has problems practising properly and is in danger of becoming one of snooker's least fulfilled players. Just one tournament win the 1996 Irish Masters, is a paltry return for a player of his ability.

"My father was my biggest critic and supporter, the driving force for me," Morgan said. "When you're used to being phoned down the club with 'how many hours have you done today' or being told to go back to practise because you've gone home early, it's a massive hole to fill when it's no longer there."

"I love my wife and kids and I know I should focus on them as my inspiration, but it's not the same. I've been playing snooker for 15 years and I bet he's lived



Darren Morgan: Struggle is 'cracking me up'

Photograph: Allsport

every ball. He couldn't be there all the time because of my mother's illness, but every single pot he was there with me."

Morgan's first inclination after his father died was to work like fury, to take out his grief on the table. But as the pain subsided his drive went with it and now he labours for two or three hours a day, just enough "so I'm not an embarrassment".

"I'm finding it very hard to get motivated," he said. "I've gone heavily into fish-

ing to relax and sometimes I think I'd rather be doing that than playing snooker. It's a lot less hassle and there's no disappointment. You go by a river and if you catch something you catch something, if you don't you have a peaceful afternoon."

"It would be ludicrous if I did drop out of the top 16, because on my day I know I'm a top four player. It's cracking me up to know I'm struggling. I still want to be

world champion."

If those comments are contradictory, it probably sums up Morgan's state of mind. If you had to pinpoint a weakness in his prime years it was his mental approach. He did not have the will of the great champion, or at least he had not acquired it before his troubles began.

Steve Davis, in his blinkered pomp, would not have let himself be distracted when the boxer Naseem Hamed turned up at the Crucible in the last World Championship to support Morgan's opponent, Stephen Hendry. He would have used it as a motivational tool, driving away the world featherweight champion with the weight of his scoring.

Morgan, 6-4 up in the quarter-final and playing as well as anyone in the tournament, could barely pot a ball and his impetus had gone by the time the interval was reached and he could insist that the flamboyantly-dressed Hamed was removed from his front-row seat. He lost 13-10, another near miss in a career of so many nears.

That is in the past, the very thing Morgan is trying not to dwell on. "For the first few tournaments this year my head was in a jam jar. I played terrible, couldn't pot a ball at the UK Championship [where he

reached the last 16]. I started to improve and it proved to myself it's still all there and that if I can concentrate I can still play."

"A few months ago Terry Griffiths said I was the best player to come out of Wales, which is probably the biggest compliment I've had in my life. Coming from a former world champion it was fantastic. He doesn't know how the hell I haven't got a mantlepiece full of trophies. He can't understand it and neither can I."

Perhaps greater understanding will come in Newport this week at a tournament that is staged just a few miles from his home. Morgan's friends believe just a little encouragement will make all the difference, but a poor performance could push him too far the other way.

"When it's on your own back door everyone wants to do well, but sometimes it can be a little bit harder," Morgan said. "Everyone wants you to succeed and you want to do well for them in return. It puts pressure on you. Sometimes you handle it all right and other times you fall apart."

With everything that has happened in his life in the past two years, Morgan deserves a break. Perhaps then the clouds truly will disappear.

TENNIS

Williams sisters get their act together

The teenage Williams sisters both won quarter-final matches in the Sydney International tennis tournament yesterday, setting up the possibility of a family affair in the final on Saturday.

The American teenager Serena Williams, playing in only her sixth tour event, had the

Agassi continues his revival but Rusedski loses again

Andre Agassi, the former world No 1, boosted his confidence ahead of the Australian Open with a three-set victory over Goran Ivanisevic in Melbourne yesterday, while Greg Rusedski put a brave face on another defeat, this time by Pete Sampras.

Agassi, who is clawing his way back up the ratings after slipping to No 110 last year, beat the Croatian 6-4, 6-7, 6-3 in the Kooyong Classic, and, after his victory over Austria's Thomas Muster on Wednesday, that put him in the final.

"I'm hitting the ball really well, moving well, serving well, volleying well," Agassi said after the match. "I really feel like my game is coming around every time I'm out there, which is a great sign."

He will play the winner of today's match between Australia's Mark Philippoussis, who beat Rusedski on Wednesday, and the French Open champion, Gustavo Kuerten.

Sampas put on a stronger performance in the losers'

biggest win of her career by defeating Lindsay Davenport, the world No 3, yesterday to reach the semi-finals at the Sydney international tournament.

Williams, 16, then saw her 17-year-old sister, Venus, thrash Bulgaria's Magdalena Maleeva 6-2, 6-2 for a place in the other semi-final - leaving open the possibility of a Williams family final on Saturday.

Serena appeared to be out-classed and on her way out as she prepared to face two match

points at 2-5 in the second set after winning only one game in a first set lasting 20 minutes. But she staged a remarkable comeback, winning 20 of the next 21 points for the second set before beating her fellow American 1-6, 7-5, 7-5 in a match lasting two hours and five minutes.

Davenport's defeat left Spain's Arantxa Sanchez Vicario as the last remaining seed in the women's singles. The top seed Martina Hingis was knocked out by Venus Williams in the first round. Sanchez Vicario, seeded five, beat the unseeded Natasha Zvereva of Belarus 6-1, 6-2 and now faces Serena Williams.

In the men's singles Tim Henman, the British No 2, set up a semi-final with the top seeded Australian, Patrick Rafter, by beating Sweden's Thomas Enqvist in three sets yesterday.

Henman, the defending champion and the 19th-ranked player in the world, dropped the first set before battling back to win 3-6, 7-5, 6-4. Earlier in the day Henman took just 28 minutes to complete a 7-6, 6-4 quarter-final victory over the Spaniard, Albert Portas.

To avoid slipping further in the world rankings next week, Henman must survive the serve-and-volley tactics of the US Open champion, Rafter, who hammered America's Todd Martin after losing a tie-break in the second set 6-4, 6-7, 6-1.

● Steffi Graf, who has not played since last year's French Open, will make her comeback at a tournament in Tokyo from 2 to 8 February. The former No 1 in the world had no more problems with her left knee and was fit after three weeks of training in Florida.



The comeback kid: Serena Williams returns a backhand during her brave victory over her American compatriot Lindsay Davenport in Sydney yesterday. The teenager saved two match points

Photograph: Reuters

Weston steps up a class and is expected to fill Schofield's boots

Huddersfield's hopes of making an impression in the Super League may depend on the displays of their new stand-off, Craig Weston.

Dave Hadfield on the Australian who has a hard act to follow.

If Britain's most-capped stand-off feels the need to face on the boots very often this year, it will mean that his own plans for the position at Huddersfield have back-fired.

In their player-coach, Garry Schofield, the newly promoted club have on hand the doyen of the role for almost a decade. But it will suit Schofield best if the slightly less recognisable figure of Craig Weston fills the No 6 shirt successfully in 1998.

"I will play if I'm needed," says Schofield. "But I hope that I won't be."

The man he sees as his replacement, the 24-year-old

NEW FACES FOR '98

CRAIG WESTON

The question now is whether Weston can make the step up in class. Despite warnings from everyone - Schofield included - that it will be a whole new ball game, he approaches the experience with a matter-of-fact determination to take it all in his stride.

"It's going to be faster," he concedes. "But we can adjust to the extra pace. That will be the main difference - the hits won't be any harder. A lot of it will be mental. If we go out there thinking that they're all a lot better than us, then we're beaten before we start."

Weston has impressed good

judges in this country. St Helens tried to sign him before the re-organisation of Super League gave him the chance to play at that level with Huddersfield and his pedigree is a good one. He played for the crack Australian Schoolboys side before moving to the Gold Coast and the South Queensland Crushers.

Neither of those clubs turned out to be an ideal career move, but Weston has been replaced for the coming campaign by Chris Orr, with whom Weston played as a schoolboy in Sydney and as a professional with Gold Coast. "We have played a lot together and have always worked well," Weston says. "One of Chris's characteristics is that he

is a very good talker and organiser.

"No disrespect to Ali, but that wasn't his strength, so having Chris there will take a lot of the pressure off me and make life so much easier."

"He came to England on his honeymoon last year and I was able to tip off Huddersfield that he was looking for a club."

The two have trained together in Sydney since the end of last season, spending long hours pounding up a punishing series of steps at their local beach, so neither fitness nor mutual understanding should be a problem when the begins in the 1998 Super League season.

The Cool Islander, Ali Davys, seemed to most observers to do pretty well there last season, but he has been replaced for the coming campaign by Chris Orr, with whom Weston played as a schoolboy in Sydney and as a professional with Gold Coast.

"Obviously it's going to be harder against the likes of Wigan and Bradford, but there



Craig Weston: Key role

are some poor Super League sides, some teams down towards the foot of the table who we think we can beat."

Weston says.

"I enjoyed it so much last season that my aim has to be to enjoy it just as much this time."

If he does, it will probably mean that Schofield will be able to enjoy a sideline view of Huddersfield's progress. The former Great Britain captain will not be throwing away his boots just yet, but if Weston lives up to his coach's expectations they might only be used on the training paddock.

RUGBY LEAGUE

Murray wants trophies as well as attacking flair

Graham Murray has pledged to continue the Leeds tradition of attacking, entertaining rugby - with the important difference that he intends to win a trophy or two as well.

Leeds' new Australian coach met the players for the first time yesterday and is preparing them for Paul Broadbent's testimonial match against Sheffield Eagles on Sunday.

"There's a good foundation here, but it's a bit more of an attractive style of football that I'd like to play," Murray said. "There's a balance to be struck. Winning is the bottom line but we are in the entertainment business and we've got to give people a match worth watching."

The Leeds chief executive, Gary Hetherington, said it was Murray's commitment to attractive, winning rugby over the past 10 years that had convinced the club that he was the right man to replace Dean Bell, who has taken on a youth development role.

Murray was well regarded

for his work as coach at Illawarra. He then coached Fiji in the 1995 World Cup and performed wonders with Hunter Mariners, taking them to the final of the World Club Championship in their only season.

It was the draw-out death of the Mariners that freed Murray to take over at Headingley. "I'm very appreciative of the way the club waited for everything to be sorted out," he said as he took over a job he was offered last November.

Murray has watched tapes of Leeds in action, singling out Lestyn Harris, Richie Blackmore and Adrian Morley as players he looks forward to working with. He is likely to return to Australia to fill his remaining place on the overseas quota, with one of his players from the Mariners, Brad Godden, the leading candidate.

● Paul Rowley, the Halifax hooker, has signed a new three-year contract with the Super League club.

- Dave Hadfield

FOOTBALL

Palace swell their international ranks

Crystal Palace's fortunes may be on the up after the club announced they had agreed a deal to sign the French defender Valérian Ismael for a club record £2.75m and had also persuaded Tom Brolin to stay with them until the end of the season.

Ismael, a French Under-21 player, agreed to move to Palace on a four-and-a-half-year contract from Strasbourg, even though he admitted knowing little about the Eagles.

Speaking through an interpreter, he said: "I like the English game, with the contact, and I knew the name of Crys-

tal Palace. I am pleased to play for a club in the capital and it will be good for me and my family. It is an exciting challenge to play with Tomas Brolin, Michele Padovano and Attilio Lombardo. I will enjoy playing in the Premiership because of the atmosphere and the fans."

However, French transfer regulations mean Ismael will not be available to play at Oakwell on Saturday, but should be set for his debut in next Saturday's FA Cup fourth-round tie at home to Leicester.

Brolin, meanwhile, will be ready to face Barnsley, after his

two-week training period with Palace whetted his appetite for the Premiership again.

The Swedish striker said: "They believe in me here and that's a good thing to have when you go out on to the pitch. I know what I can do when people trust in me and try to help me. I'm keen to stay because it's a very nice club with nice players and I can be a success here."

Manchester United's solicitor Maurice Watkins claimed he was " bemused" by reports that the club have agreed a £50m sponsorship deal with Ford.

Watkins claimed the club were not even in discussions with the company, which currently backs the Spanish First Division side Valencia. A spokeswoman for Ford admitted they were interested in football sponsorship, but denied reports of any future agreement with United.

Aston Villa's Yugoslav international Sasa Curcic is in Istanbul for transfer talks with Besiktas. Curcic has been unsettled at Villa Park and has reportedly agreed a film deal with John Toshack's side. Villa paid £4.5m for Curcic from Bolton 18 months ago.

Villa will, however, welcome back Dwight Yorke, who has been given permission by Trinidad and Tobago to leave the Gold Cup in America to play in the fourth-round FA Cup tie with West Bromwich on 24 January.

Scotland's 40 league clubs will hold a special general meeting early next month to decide if they will support a breakaway move proposed by the Premier Division clubs, following a vote by the League management committee meeting yesterday.

— Catherine Riley

Coates bows to pressure and steps down at Stoke

Peter Coates, the Stoke City chairman, has stepped down in the wake of his club's 7-0 humiliation at home to Birmingham last Saturday. The defeat sparked furious protests by the club's supporters, who also saw their side beaten 3-1 in the FA Cup with West Bromwich on Tuesday.

Coates became chairman 12 years ago and enjoyed success when Lou Macari led Stoke back to the First Division in 1993, but he has also been the subject of numerous demonstrations from supporters who claim the club have not invested enough money in the team.

Coates insisted it was his decision to leave, despite repeated calls by supporters for him to be replaced. "The decision to go was entirely mine. I've made it because I think a change would be good for the club and for me," he said.

"Being chairman involves a lot of hard work and pressures.

I never intended to do it forever, contrary to what some people might have thought."

It is not yet known who will take over from Coates at the Britannia Stadium, but he will stay on the board and his successor is expected to be announced in the next few days. The club is also facing managerial turmoil with Chris Kamara at the centre of a tug-of-war between Stoke and Portsmouth.

Kamara, sacked by Bradford City last week, is favourite to replace Chris Bates at Stoke. However, Portsmouth have also sounded out Kamara about becoming their next manager after the sacking of Terry Fenwick.

Kamara is due for talks with Pompey today, but Stoke may now increase the intensity of their interest in him or lose out. Bates is ready to stand down at Stoke and could even team up with Kamara, which may go some way to appeasing their fans.

— Alan Nixon

NON-LEAGUE NOTEBOOK

Bodmin lead the long-distance travellers

The status of the FA Carlsberg Vase as a truly national competition is reinforced by tomorrow's fourth-round ties, which see several of the 32 sides left in the tournament make huge journeys across England.

The Cornish club Bodmin Town have the longest expedition: an 822-mile round trip to Billingham Town, on Teesside. It is the Jarrow South Western League outfit's first season in the Vase, and not surprisingly it is the longest distance they have ever travelled for a match.

Despite the cost, Bodmin are looking forward to their weekend away — they will be staying

in a hotel in Stainton, near Middlesbrough, tonight and tomorrow. "It will be a unique experience for us," their secretary, Martin Mullis, said.

In contrast to Bodmin's two-night stop-over, Bedlington Terriers are making the trek from Northumberland to Suffolk to play Sudbury Wanderers with in one day. They plan to leave Newcastle at 8am tomorrow, travelling by train as far as Cambridge, from where a coach will ferry them to Sudbury. They should be back in Newcastle by midnight.

"Some of our players are steelworkers, and cannot finish work in time to set off on Friday," Eric Young, the secretary of Bedlington, who are 15 points clear at the top of the Federation Brewery Northern League, explained. "We had planned to go to Sudbury via London, using the Underground to get across town, but we decided that was too risky."

There will be two Vase ties in Sudbury tomorrow. One mile down the River Stour from Wanderers' Brandon Lane ground, Sudbury Town entertain Burscough, from the North West Counties League, at the Priory stadium.

— Rupert Metcalf

SPORTING DIGEST

HOCKEY

Hightown happy with guest

With England travelling to Australia for a two-week tour and two Tests, this weekend's Women's National Indoor programme will have many unfamiliar names in the line-ups.

Though the national championships will be missing their leading goalscorer, Jane Smith, but will have Julia Robertson back on duty. Hightown will be handicapped by the absence of Tina Cullen and Carolyn Reid.

and their coach, Maggie Souyave, all of whom are en route to Australia.

With games against Slough and Ipswich, also on maximum points, much will rest on the 20-year-old Denise Marston-Smith. The Clifton player guesting for Hightown scored six times in each of their opening games, against Doncaster and Olton. — Bill Colwill

Athletics

South Africa's Olympic champion Josia Thugwane and Abel Anton, the Spanish world-title-holder, will take part in the Flora London Marathon on April 11.

Badminton

JAPAN OPEN (Tokyo): Men's singles third round: P G Christensen (Den) vs R Magnusson (Swe) 16-15; Chen Kai-Han (Twn) vs M. Yamamoto (Jpn) 16-15; Lin Chia-Chen (Twn) vs M. Matsui (Jpn) 16-15; Ha Teck-Lawn (Eng) vs D. Vian (Eng) 16-15; Luo Yiqing (Eng) vs L. Wang (Eng) 16-15; Chen Kai-Han (Twn) vs P E Hoyle-Larsen (Den) 15-12; Lu En-hong (Eng) vs I. Vignes (Indon) 11-15; Chen Kai-Han (Twn) vs D. Vian (Eng) 15-12; Lin Chia-Chen (Twn) vs K. Matsui (Jpn) 16-15; Men's doubles second round: W. H. Liang and C. Lee (Eng) vs K. Matsui and K. Matsui (Jpn) 16-15; C. Lee and K. Ho and Christensen (Den) 15-12; Chen Kai-Han and L. Wang (Eng) vs D. Vian (Eng) 16-15; Chen Kai-Han and L. Wang (Eng) vs D. Vian (Eng) 16-15; Chen Kai-Han and L. Wang (Eng) vs D. Vian (Eng) 16-15; Chen Kai-Han and L. Wang (Eng) vs D. Vian (Eng) 16-15.

Cricket

SECOND TEST (Colombia, second day): Dench won by 10 wickets.

Football

EUROPEAN CHAMPIONSHIP First Division: Scotland 3, Avon Insurance Combination First Division: Swindon 4, Portsmouth 1; Tonbridge 2, Brighton 0, The Times FA Youth Cup 2,000 3,000 4,000 5,000 6,000 7,000 8,000 9,000 10,000 11,000 12,000 13,000 14,000 15,000 16,000 17,000 18,000 19,000 20,000 21,000 22,000 23,000 24,000 25,000 26,000 27,000 28,000 29,000 30,000 31,000 32,000 33,000 34,000 35,000 36,000 37,000 38,000 39,000 40,000 41,000 42,000 43,000 44,000 45,000 46,000 47,000 48,000 49,000 50,000 51,000 52,000 53,000 54,000 55,000 56,000 57,000 58,000 59,000 60,000 61,000 62,000 63,000 64,000 65,000 66,000 67,000 68,000 69,000 70,000 71,000 72,000 73,000 74,000 75,000 76,000 77,000 78,000 79,000 80,000 81,000 82,000 83,000 84,000 85,000 86,000 87,000 88,000 89,000 90,000 91,000 92,000 93,000 94,000 95,000 96,000 97,000 98,000 99,000 100,000 101,000 102,000 103,000 104,000 105,000 106,000 107,000 108,000 109,000 110,000 111,000 112,000 113,000 114,000 115,000 116,000 117,000 118,000 119,000 120,000 121,000 122,000 123,000 124,000 125,000 126,000 127,000 128,000 129,000 130,000 131,000 132,000 133,000 134,000 135,000 136,000 137,000 138,000 139,000 140,000 141,000 142,000 143,000 144,000 145,000 146,000 147,000 148,000 149,000 150,000 151,000 152,000 153,000 154,000 155,000 156,000 157,000 158,000 159,000 160,000 161,000 162,000 163,000 164,000 165,000 166,000 167,000 168,000 169,000 170,000 171,000 172,000 173,000 174,000 175,000 176,000 177,000 178,000 179,000 180,000 181,000 182,000 183,000 184,000 185,000 186,000 187,000 188,000 189,000 190,000 191,000 192,000 193,000 194,000 195,000 196,000 197,000 198,000 199,000 200,000 201,000 202,000 203,000 204,000 205,000 206,000 207,000 208,000 209,000 210,000 211,000 212,000 213,000 214,000 215,000 216,000 217,000 218,000 219,000 220,000 221,000 222,000 223,000 224,000 225,000 226,000 227,000 228,000 229,000 230,000 231,000 232,000 233,000 234,000 235,000 236,000 237,000 238,000 239,000 240,000 241,000 242,000 243,000 244,000 245,000 246,000 247,000 248,000 249,000 250,000 251,000 252,000 253,000 254,000 255,000 256,000 257,000 258,000 259,000 260,000 261,000 262,000 263,000 264,000 265,000 266,000 267,000 268,000 269,000 270,000 271,000 272,000 273,000 274,000 275,000 276,000 277,000 278,000 279,000 280,000 281,000 282,000 283,000 284,000 285,000 286,000 287,000 288,000 289,000 290,000 291,000 292,000 293,000 294,000 295,000 296,000 297,000 298,000 299,000 300,000 301,000 302,000 303,000 304,000 305,000 306,000 307,000 308,000 309,000 310,000 311,000 312,000 313,000 314,000 315,000 316,000 317,000 318,000 319,000 320,000 321,000 322,000 323,000 324,000 325,000 326,000 327,000 328,000 329,000 330,000 331,000 332,000 333,000 334,000 335,000 336,000 337,000 338,000 339,000 340,000 341,000 342,000 343,000 344,000 345,000 346,000 347,000 348,000 349,000 350,000 351,000 352,000 353,000 354,000 355,000 356,000 357,000 358,000 359,000 360,000 361,000 362,000 363,000 364,000 365,000 366,000 367,000 368,000 369,000 370,000 371,000 372,000 373,000 374,000 375,000 376,000 377,000 378,000 379,000 380,000 381,000 382,000 383,000 384,000 385,000 386,000 387,000 388,000 389,000 390,000 391,000 392,000 393,000 394,000 395,000 396,000 397,000 398,000 399,000 400,000 401,000 402,000 403,000 404,000 405,000 406,000 407,000 408,000 409,000 410,000 411,000 412,000 413,000 414,000 415,000 416,000 417,000 418,000 419,000 420,000 421,000 422,000 423,000 424,000 425,000 426,000 427,000 428,000 429,000 430,000 431,000 432,000 433,000 434,000 435,000 436,000 437,000 438,000 439,000 440,000 441,000 442,000 443,000 444,000 445,000 446,000 447,000 448,000 449,000 450,000 451,000 452,000 453,000 454,000 455,000 456,000 457,000 458,000 459,000 460,000 461,000 462,000 463,000 464,000 465,000 466,000 467,000 468,000 469,000 470,000 471,000 472,000 473,000 474,000 475,000 476,000 477,000 478,000 479,000 480,000 481,000 482,000 483,000 484,000 485,000 486,000 487,000 488,000 489,000 490,000 491,000 492,000 493,000 494,000 495,000 496,000 497,000 498,000 499,000 500,000 501,000 502,000 503,000 504,000 505,000 506,000 507,000 508,000 509,000 510,000 511,000 512,000 513,000 514,000 515,000 516,000 517,000 518,000 519,000

Asprilla's new tune hits the wrong note with Toon Army

The two things the supporters of Newcastle United Football Club least expected to have to contemplate this season were relegation and the departure of Faustino Asprilla.

The drop can still be avoided, but the exit of a Tyneside favourite looks to be a formality. Nick Duxbury reports.

The shocks came thick and fast yesterday at Newcastle. The club confirmed that the player second only to Alan Shearer in the affections of the Toon Army had indeed asked to leave and moreover they had given him permission to talk to Parma about a move back to the Italian club.

Faustino Asprilla, 29-year-old Colombian international, who joined Newcastle from Parma in February 1996 for £7.5m, went about training as usual, but the heart the fans thought beat only for Tyneside now longs for Italy.

Fjortoft fits the bill for Barnsley

The Barnsley manager Danny Wilson signed the Norwegian international Jan Age Fjortoft from Sheffield United yesterday - after initial fears the deal was dead due to Brian Deane's £1m departure to Benfica.

Wilson moved in for Fjortoft yesterday after watching him play for the Blades in Tuesday's FA Cup third-round replay at Bury, but when the Benfica coach, Graeme Souness, moved in to secure Deane the deal seemed in jeopardy.

United's chief executive, Charles Green, had said the club would not contemplate selling two strikers. But, in a change of policy which leaves United with just two senior forwards on their books in Dean Saunders and Gareth Taylor, the Blades have decided to part with both players.

Like Deane, Fjortoft has signed a two-and-a-half year deal with his new club, with Barnsley paying £200,000. The Oakwell chairman, John Dennis, believes the former Swindon and Middlesbrough striker is a much-needed addition to the squad, particularly with the £1.5m club record signing, the Macedonian international Georgi Hristov, having failed to

And there was more to come with the Newcastle manager, Kenny Dalglish, admitting that he had known of Asprilla's intentions he would never have sold Les Ferdinand to Tottenham for £6m. With Shearer injured, Ferdinand gone and Asprilla about to leave, Dalglish is left with a pop-gun attack with which to secure Premiership safety.

Dalglish was disappointed at Asprilla's decision, but realised that if the Colombian wanted to go there was not much the club could do about it. The manager also claimed that Asprilla had told him at the start of the season that he would be happy to stay until the summer.

Although the United boss tried to persuade the South American to change his mind, it now seems certain the way is left open for the striker, whose skills delighted the St James' Park crowd, to return to Serie A with Parma.

"We believed Tino will be perfectly happy at the start of the season. If not we would not have sold Les Ferdinand to Tottenham," said Dalglish, who will hope to recoup the bulk of the £7.5m that his predecessor,

Kevin Keegan, paid for the entertaining Asprilla.

"When his [Asprilla's] agent spoke to us just before Christmas and said his player was unhappy we dismissed this. In fact, we ignored Parma's approaches twice. But, if he wants to leave, it is in our interests as well as his to allow him to go."

"The club have spoken to Parma and Tino will be talking to them but most of the stuff is done on the deal - certainly between Parma and Tino - and it should go through very quickly."

Dalglish admitted that Asprilla had been popular in the dressing-room with his teammates as well as with the fans.

"He was very popular with the rest of the lads and instead of remembering recent days I would like to remember him for his performance against Barcelona," he said, referring to Asprilla's stunning Champions League hat-trick against the Spanish giants in mid-September.

"It's a bit of a disappointment that we've had to make a decision at this moment in time and that disappointment I am sure will be shared by our supporters," he added.

Asprilla was at Newcastle's Chester-le-Street training ground yesterday, although he did not train with the rest of the squad as they prepared for the Bolton game.

The Colombian has been struggling for form and fitness since recovering from a groin operation which kept him out for three months and is currently out of the side with a thigh injury.

Asprilla's imminent departure is sure to put Dalglish under increasing pressure to make a major signing. Yesterday's signing of the 24-year-old former West Ham and Metz centre-back, David Terrier, did not quite fit the bill.

Keegan, now running the show at Third Division Fulham, was amazed to hear that Asprilla could be leaving.

"I fetched him and a lot of people blamed him for losing us the championship, which was totally unfair," Keegan said. "People questioned why he came. He was bought for the Newcastle fans not for anyone else and they will be very sad to see him go.

"They will miss him, but if Kenny thinks that is right as long as he spends the money on another player of equal standing, who maybe can bring Newcastle more success than they are enjoying at the moment, I think the fans will put up with it."

Fulham deal, page 26
More football, page 29

score consistently since his summer arrival. "Danny has been looking for someone who can regularly score goals and Jan fits the bill," Dennis said.

Deane, who passed his medical yesterday, has agreed a deal believed to be worth £20,000 per week - wages which the Blades revealed were "impossible to match". United have been forced to cash in as Deane would have been out of contract in the summer and available to leave the club on a free transfer under the Bosman ruling.

Andy Hinchcliffe's £3.2m move from Everton to Tottenham was called off because of problems caused by an old cruciate ligament injury. The England left-back has been told that Spurs do not believe he will be fully fit for about three months.

In a confidential letter to Everton, the White Hart Lane club explained that their medical checks revealed Hinchcliffe's thigh muscle was weakened as a result of the cruciate injury. He was out for nine months with cruciate ligament damage sustained in December 1996, and during his rehabilitation the thigh muscle on the leg was impaired.

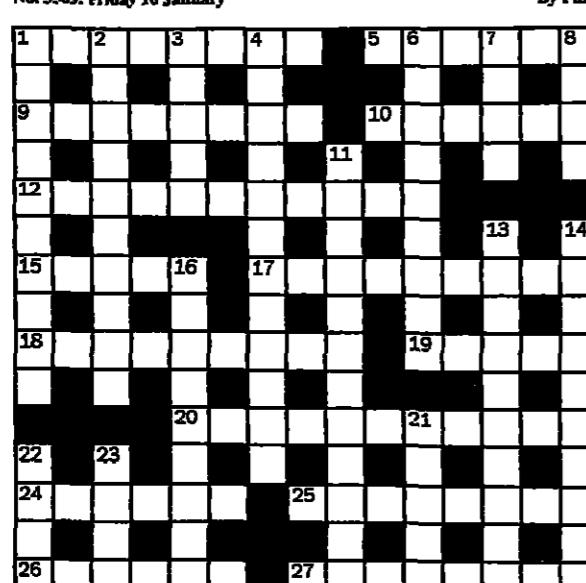
- Alan Nixon

THE INDEPENDENT CROSSWORD

No. 3509. Friday 16 January

By Phil

Thursday's solution



RUGBY UNION

Surgeon lambasted for claiming ear was not bitten

The Great Mystery of Simon Fenn's Ear
reached new heights of black comedy yesterday as both London Scottish and Bath distanced themselves from the latest medical opinion on the subject.

Chris Hewett reports on a very peculiar turn of events.

Philip Bliss, honorary surgeon to Bath Rugby Club, dipped an uninvited toe into the murky waters of the Kevin Yates ear-biting saga yesterday and promptly found himself on the receiving end of some sharp rebuttals from every conceivable direction. Mr Bliss' view that the injury suffered by Simon Fenn during last weekend's Bath-London Scottish cup tie showed no sign of being caused by a rogue set of teeth brought a furious reaction from the complainants and an embarrassed one from the defendants. Mr Bliss' comments

have caused outrage here at the club."

Bath were no more supportive of the surgeon's "findings" and quickly distanced themselves from his comments. "They have been made in a personal capacity and not as an officer or employee of the club," said the club in a formal statement. "We neither requested nor encouraged any statement from Mr Bliss."

All of which was too much for London Scottish, who were already feeling tender at criticism of their initial move in cutting the entire Bath front row for foul play. "It was a bite, not a boot," Richard Yerbury, the Exiles' chief executive, said. "We have evidence that clearly shows the cause of injury and it will be presented to the Rugby Football Union at the appropriate time."

"We want to resolve this properly and not turn it into a circus, but we will take very firm steps to slap down attempts to divert attention from the real cause of injury. Claims that this was not a bite are starting to seem like a smoke-screen. Mr Bliss' comments

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Bliss."

Yates, the loose-head prop suspended by Bath pending further inquiries, will appear before an internal disciplinary hearing on Tuesday. The proceedings may be chaired by an independent legal expert, possibly a circuit judge, but whatever the findings, the whole issue will still go before the RFU's own disciplinary panel.

Meanwhile, Philippe Saint-

Andre, the French captain, will

miss next month's Five Nations opener with England in Paris because of a chronic thigh condition. The Gloucester wing had a scan on Wednesday before being ruled out of all rugby for six weeks.

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Please act NOW - winter is here



Looking back: A subdued Faustino Asprilla arrives at Newcastle United's training ground in Chester-le-Street yesterday

Photograph: North News

CRICKET

Positive Russell ready to reclaim his Test place

Jack Russell can start his move back into the Test arena after a 17-month absence when he plays in the opening match of England's tour of the West Indies, starting here in Montego Bay, Jamaica, today.